

A Highly Disreputable Enterprise: Men-on-the-Spot and the Allied Intervention in the Russian
Civil War, 1917-1920

Undergraduate Research Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation "with Honors Research
Distinction in History" in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Conrad Allen

The Ohio State University

May 2016

Project Advisor: Professor Jennifer Siegel, Department of History

The First World War ended on November 11, 1918. The guns that had battered away at each other in France and Belgium for four long years finally fell silent at eleven A.M. as the signed armistice went into effect. "There came a second of expectant silence, and then a curious rippling sound, which observers far behind the front likened to the noise of a light wind. It was the sound of men cheering from the Vosges to the sea," recorded South African soldier John Buchan, as victorious Allied troops went wild with celebration. "No sleep all night," wrote Harry Truman, then an artillery officer on the Western Front, "The infantry fired Very pistols, sent up all the flares they could lay their hands on, fired rifles, pistols, whatever else would make noise, all night long."¹ They celebrated their victory, and the fact that they had survived the worst war of attrition the world had ever seen. "I've lived through the war!" cheered an airman in the mess hall of ace pilot Eddie Rickenbacker's American fighter squadron. "We won't be shot at any more!"²

But all was not quiet on every front. On the complete other side of continental Europe, far away from France and the party in Eddie Rickenbacker's aerodrome, American and British soldiers were still under fire. At the very moment the armistice went into effect, a fierce hand-to-hand battle raged in a tiny village in northern Russia. Here, in the log-cabin village of Tulgas, near the seaport of Archangel, a handful of British and American troops hunkered down in block houses, taking cover from artillery shells and snipers. The battle lasted all Armistice Day, and another three days after that, before the assorted Allied troops finally drove off their attackers. The men on the other side of the line, however, were not Germans, they were Russian communists. While the rest of the Allied armies in France celebrated the end of one sprawling,

¹ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 503.

² Ibid., 501.

bloody conflict, this small Allied unit had just taken part in the beginning of another one: the Russian Civil War.³

What were Allied soldiers doing fighting Russians at the end of World War I? Brigadier-General William Edmund Ironside, the British commander of the force fighting at Tulgas, was not entirely sure himself. Thirty-eight years old in 1918, "Tiny" Ironside was as much of a born fighter as his name suggested: square-jawed, six feet four inches, weighing more than two hundred and fifty pounds. He had taken over his position as head of Allied troops in North Russia that October, with orders to safe-guard the port city of Archangel and defend its stores of war goods.⁴ But he was supposed to be fighting Germans, not Russian revolutionaries, and his present situation left him flummoxed. "The force found itself with the worst possible position that a Regular force, small in number, can find itself in," he reported. "Exposed to an irregular but numberless enemy, it had no clear objective except to remain on the defensive."⁵

Unclear objectives were to be a staple of the Allied mission to Russia. Towards the end of 1917, Russia's war effort against Germany collapsed. The Tsar abdicated, replaced by a Provisional Government. Russian soldiers mutinied in swarms, refusing to fight, shooting their own officers, and deserting back home. Revolutionaries ousted the Provisional Government in November, spearheaded by Vladimir Lenin's communist Bolshevik Party, which promised peace with the Central Powers, prompting fears in Russia's allies, Britain, France, and the United States. If Germany won the war against Russia, it could seize enormous amounts of supplies, food, and resources from the territory it occupied, and transfer hundreds of thousands of soldiers to the Western Front.

³ Benjamin D. Rhodes, "The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel, 1918-1918: The Role of the 339th Infantry," *The International History Review* 8 (1986): 367-388.

⁴ John Silverlight, *The Victors' Dilemma: Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), 174.

⁵ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 278.

To stave off German victory, the Allies decided to intervene in Russia. Troops, like Ironside's command, were dispatched to guard resources from German encroachment, and to hopefully provide a backbone for a reconstituted Russian Army that would reopen the war on the Eastern Front and take pressure off of its allies in the west. Ironside was one of many foreign commanders sent to Russia. Britain, France, the United States, Japan, and other Allied nations sent soldiers the Russian Empire in the wake of the revolution, to observe the situation and to help organize renewed local resistance to the Germans. When Lenin made peace with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, he earned the lasting enmity of these Allied military missions. Beyond making peace with the Central Powers, the Bolsheviks humiliated the Entente powers diplomatically by publishing secret treaties made during the war between Britain, France, Italy, and Russia, often at the expense of their other allies. The Bolsheviks further angered the Allied governments by repudiating the vast debts owed by Imperial Russia to Britain and France, as well as seizing private property in Russia, including that owned by foreign citizens. The cancellation of debts particularly affected France, whose citizens had supplied a vast amount of capital to Russia before the war. When the Bolshevik government renounced the debts, it threatened to ruin an entire generation of French men and women who had invested their life savings in Russian industry. Angered by the Bolshevik's refusal to fight the Germans and their political insolence, the Allies approached Russia's counterrevolutionary movements for assistance fighting the Central Powers and reversing the course of the revolution.⁶

The First World War ended only several months later, in November, just as the intervention was starting to pick up speed. One objective of the intervention, beating the Germans, became redundant, but while one war was over, now the Allies were entangled in another. The nature of the Anglo-French intervention changed as they funneled support to

⁶ Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 72.

Russia's counterrevolutionary White movement, which ended up fighting the Bolsheviks rather than the Germans. As the Allies drifted from their original objectives and the intervention increased in scope, it lost direction. British foreign policy, unmoored by four years of war, was chaotic and misguided during the Russian Civil War. In the absence (or sometimes in subversion) of guidance from governments at home, the military missions embroiled far away in the total anarchy of the civil war took on the role of "men-on-the-spot," or virtually independent administrators making decisions on the ground. Influenced by their own implicit biases, a handful of British generals in missions to the White armies turned a half-hearted campaign originally intended to fight the Central Powers into a fully-fledged war on Bolshevism, which only ended due to British war-weariness and the defeat of their White allies. The French government, on the other hand, despite being virulently anti-Bolshevik, had a much more limited participation in the Russian Civil War, largely because its government was less directionless in its attitude to foreign policy in Russia and resisted having a "man-on-the-spot" pull it into further fighting in Russia. It is the crucial impact, or lack thereof, of these British and French "generals-on-the-spot" on the anti-Bolshevik war effort that will be explored here.

The idea that the Allied military missions played the role of policy makers was proposed by Brock Millman in his 1998 article, "The Problem with Generals: Military Observers and the Origins of Intervention in Russia and Persia, 1917-18." Millman identified four separate cases, in North Russia, the Caucasus, Persia, and Siberia, where British generals deployed as military observers distorted British strategy by confusing their own personal beliefs, especially strong anti-Bolshevik prejudices, with national policy. Britain never made a cognizant decision to fight the Bolsheviks; British generals did, and pulled along national strategy with them. Millman counters the usual claim that responsibility for the intervention should be laid on the shoulders of

anti-communist members of the British government, especially Churchill and Lord Curzon. Instead: "an examination of the correspondence relative to the first movements into Russia makes it quite clear that the initial policy of the government was rather more vacillating than might have been expected, given what followed, and that the driving force behind the movement of British troops into conflict was almost always a British general on the ground, invariably pursuing a policy of his own devising and rejoicing in only tenuous communications with London."⁷

Millman analyzed how British generals kick-started the intervention, but the idea should be expanded further: military observers not only commenced the Allied intervention in Russia, they also strongly influenced its course throughout, up to and including the decision to end the support given to the White armies. The story of Allied operations in the Russian Civil War differs greatly between from area to area and each specific military mission, because the British government never managed to assert its own capability to make policy independently of the "generals-on-the-spot", and ceded the direction of the intervention to them, while the French kept a tighter leash on its officers in Russia, but did not have the economic and military resources available in 1918 and 1919 to back them up. Unsurprisingly, without any cohesive grand strategy to guide them, different Allied generals pursued separate and occasionally contradictory policies in different areas of the intervention, contributing to the mission's ultimate failure.

Historian John S. Galbraith coined the term "men-on-the-spot" in his 1960 article "The 'Turbulent Frontier' as a Factor in British Expansion".⁸ Galbraith pinpointed how British imperial policy in the nineteenth century was formulated in a large part on its frontiers, where

⁷ Brock Millman, "The Problem with Generals: Military Observers and the Origins of the Intervention in Russian and Persia, 1918-17." *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (1998): 291.

⁸ John Galbraith, "The 'Turbulent Frontier' as a Factor in British Expansion." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (1960): 150-168.

administrators and generals took it upon themselves to wage war or annex territory. In short, these individuals made imperial policy themselves, without any centralized scheme from London, and these personal decisions then set in motion all the ponderous machinery of British imperialism. John Gallagher, Alice Denny, and Robert Robinson explained further how these individual administrators took their implicit biases with them as they shaped imperial policy: "Statesmen did more than respond to pressures and calculate interests; their decisions were not mere mechanical choices of expedients. Judgments and actions in fact were heavily prejudiced by their beliefs about morals and politics, about the duties of government, the ordering of society and international relations. And their attitudes to such questions tended to be specialized and idiosyncratic because they felt that their unique function and responsibility set them apart."⁹ This individualistic and ad-hoc method of empire planning could and did cause chaos. Decisions were taken without thought for their consequences, and strong-minded administrators might reverse decades of policy to pursue their own ideas of British interests. Kwasi Kwarteng terms this "anarchic individualism": "Individual officials wielded immense power and it was this unrestrained power that ultimately led to instability, disorder, and chaos."¹⁰

This trend of individualistic imperial policy making continued into the twentieth century. Historian Max Beloff argues that British officials were more used to governing the Empire than interacting with other European states, and that various secretaries and soldiers drew on their experiences as independent decision-makers in far-flung imperial outposts when creating policy elsewhere. "A definition of those who held power in Britain during this period should be a wide one. To pretend that a permanent secretary or chief of the Imperial General Staff were mere

⁹ Alice Denny, John Gallagher, and Ronald Robinson, "A Synthesis of Views and a Challenge for the Future," in *British Imperialism: Gold, God, Glory*, ed. Robin W. Winks (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 117.

¹⁰ Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 5.

executants of ministerial policy, or ambassadors purely mouthpieces of the foreign secretary of the day, would be to take the letter of the constitution for the reality."¹¹

Though Beloff did not note it, this tendency of British officers to set their own course when left alone would appear in Russia as well. At the beginning of the intervention, during the First World War, the Allied generals in charge took an unyieldingly hostile stance to the Bolsheviks. Because the Germans had aided and helped fund the Bolshevik Party (as a means of destabilizing Russia from within), Allied generals mistakenly viewed the Bolsheviks as German agents rather than an independent political movement. While the First World War still raged, the Allied governments, concerned more with beating the Central Powers than Russian politics, followed their lead, and so they ceded policy-making in Russia to the officers. Therefore, a political problem, the Bolshevik revolution, was treated as a military one. This thesis shows that when the First World War ended, and with it the reason for the Allied intervention in Russia, the Allied military missions continued to view the Bolsheviks as an enemy, and, due to their own personal anti-Bolshevik inclinations, intervened in force against them.

Applying Galbraith's notion of "men-on-the-spot" to British generals in the Russian Civil War sheds light on why they wielded an enormous amount of influence over British foreign policy during the Allied intervention. The trend is best exemplified by the British-led occupation of Archangel, in North Russia, and the British military mission to Siberia. At Archangel, General F.C. Poole disregarded simple instructions to safeguard the city; instead, he launched a full-blown war on the Bolsheviks in North Russia, tried to create an anti-Bolshevik army, and lorded over his zone of control more like a colonial viceroy than a friendly ally. Ironside, his successor, demonstrated the inconsistency of British policy in Russia and its dependence on local commanders when he reversed course and advocated for evacuation from North Russia in 1919.

¹¹ Max Beloff, *Imperial Sunset: Britain's Liberal Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 11.

The results of the military mission to Siberia also demonstrate the phenomenon of the "general-on-the-spot". General Knox, part of the British military mission to Siberia, or "Britmis", cultivated a personal relationship with the leader of the Siberian White government, Admiral Alexander Kolchak, and jealously wielded his influence so that his own opinions became the leading element of British policy in the Russian Far East during the war years of 1918-1920.

French generals had a harder time setting the agenda in Russia. Historically, the French Empire also had its share of men and administrators willing to create policy independent of central authority. However, the trend was not as engrained in French institutions as in British ones. M. B. Hayne's book *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War* gives a history of the French Foreign Office, known as the Quai d'Orsay, in the nineteenth century up to 1914 and the beginning of the First World War. Hayne stresses that the Quai d'Orsay, headed by a clique of professional diplomats, held an unmatched amount of clout compared to its counterparts in other countries when it came to preparing foreign policy. The elite, aristocratic diplomats of the Quai d'Orsay were not ones to be overshadowed by rogue generals deployed on far-off campaigns.¹² David Watson stresses that after the First World, furthermore, the generally tumultuous and unstable Third Republic had at its head a charismatic Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau, who could direct his government more easily than his British counterpart, David Lloyd George, who relied on an uneasy political coalition to remain in power. Clemenceau got along splendidly with the head of the Quai d'Orsay, Stephen Pinchon, Watson says, while Lloyd George did not work well with Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary in 1919. In the British government, the Foreign Office passed responsibility for the planning of the intervention to the War Cabinet, which dallied over decisions and forced commanders on the

¹² M.B. Hayne, *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War, 1898-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), 24.

ground to come up their own strategy when none came to them from above. In Paris, the combination of the Quai d'Orsay's steely grip on power and its cooperation with Clemenceau allowed the French government to retain authority over the planning for its intervention in the Russian Civil War and avoid being dragged into unwanted engagements by its generals, as happened to the British.¹³

Michael Jabara Carley, in his study of the French interevention, persuasively demonstrated the divisions within the French government and military over how to deal with the Bolshevik Revolution. The French Army, in fact, did not want to intervene in Russia originally, and so the Quai d'Orsay spearheaded the push to land French troops in Russia in late 1918. Economic goals drove the French intervention, says Carley, especially the Bolshevik renunciation of Russian debts to foreign powers, which motivated the French to try and carve out a zone of special economic interest in South Russia by launching a military occupation that worked with the counterrevolutionary White Army. The Bolsheviks and the other warring powers in Ukraine, however, proved stauncher foes than France expected, and France much weaker than it used to be.¹⁴ General Henri Berthelot, the commander of the French Army, failed to cooperate with the Whites in Ukraine, and did not have enough forces to resist Bolshevik counterattacks, which ended the French intervention only a few months after it began. Berthelot and other French officers, writes J. Kim Munholland in his monograph on the French campaign, displayed a constant pessimism and quickly grew disillusioned with the operation. Their role as "men-on-the-spot" in Russia was consequently more limited than that of British generals. The biggest contribution French generals made to foreign policy was by voicing their discontent

¹³ David Watson, "Britain, France, and the Russian Civil War," in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, ed. Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge, 2000), 94.

¹⁴ Michael Jabara Carley, *Revolution and Intervention: the French Government and the Russian Civil War 1917-1919* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), 245.

about the White Army, which helped turn French strategy in Eastern Europe away from pursuing a White victory in the Russian Civil War and towards alignment with newly independent powers, like Poland and Czechoslovakia, as buffers to Bolshevism in the east and allies against the possibility of a rearmed Germany.¹⁵

British foreign policy during the Russian Civil War rested in the hands of generals who conflated personal values with national interest, like Poole and Knox. In this it was unique. Although the Japanese deployed by far the largest amount of soldiers to Russia between 1918 and 1920, their part was no more than a cynical and mercenary land-grab, while the Americans and most of the minor Allies took almost no important action during the civil war. Only the French ever threatened to operate on a similarly massive scale, but they never had their own "general-on-the-spot", as has been discussed, because of France's limited power in 1918 and tighter control of foreign policy by the French government. This thesis expands on Brock Millman's study of the Allied military missions' outsized role in beginning the intervention, by illustrating how the personal biases of Allied officers contributed to the overall successes and failures of the intervention. It will also show that failure is bound to happen when militaries lack civilian control, and when foreign policy is misguided by personal convictions, distrust, and misunderstandings. More generally, it is also a study of how uncoordinated policy and mission creep can affect foreign military interventions, whether in the 20th or 21st centuries. Finally but by no means least, I hope to help shed light on the purposes of the Allied intervention in Russia, an often misunderstood campaign.

Today, the foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War is the most covered aspect of the conflict, in both the English and Russian literature. Peter Kenez argues, in fact, that: "Foreign

¹⁵ J. Kim Munholland, "The French Army and Intervention in Southern Russia..1918-1919," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 22 (1981): 291.

intervention is the sole aspect of the Civil War that has been adequately treated by historians," and that therefore it is often portrayed as more important than it was, by both Western historians keen to emphasize the roles played by their countrymen, or by Soviet historians eager to depict the civil war as a battle for survival against the world capitalist system.¹⁶ Certainly, the overwhelming majority of the civil war's participants and its victims, on both sides, were Russians. But we should be wary of diminishing the Allied role too much. Soldiers in the White armies wore British uniforms and carried British guns, received training from British and French officers, and support by Royal Air Force planes and British tanks. In North Russia, Allied soldiers fought directly alongside the Whites. Even anti-Bolshevik groups that did not get direct Allied support received money and weaponry from the Entente powers. The end of Allied support to the White armies was the last nail in their coffin. To understand why the Reds won and the Whites lost it is necessary to understand why the intervention failed.

One of several conflicts that followed in the wake of the First World War, the Russian Civil War was the result of two revolutions in Russia in 1917. After three years of ruinous fighting with Germany, not to mention the preceding decades of social and political unrest, the Tsarist system which had ruled Russia for centuries collapsed in February of that year amidst mutinies of soldiers and workers demanding peace at the front and reforms at home. The liberal-socialist Provisional Government that replaced the abdicated monarchy attempted to stay in the war, ensuring that it would last an even briefer tenure. Battlefield reverses continued, as well as economic shortages, and the Russian Army steadily disintegrated. At the same time that the Provisional Government attempted to issue commands from Petrograd, soldiers and workers

¹⁶ Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918: The First Year of the Volunteer Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 3.

organized their own revolutionary soviet councils in the city streets.¹⁷ Increasingly, members of Vladimir Lenin's Bolshevik Party headed the soviets, members of a much more radical bunch of revolutionaries who advocated immediate peace with the Central Powers and called for the soviets to take control of the government. The Provisional Government pleased neither side of the political spectrum, and faced unsuccessful putsches from both the right and the left, until the Bolsheviks finally toppled it in a coup in November 1917.¹⁸

Few Russians stood up to defend the Provisional Government, but groups opposed to the Bolshevik revolution emerged over the following months, beginning a civil war. For the communist revolutionaries, the civil war was not a side effect of revolution, it was a goal. "[Peace] is a slogan of philistines and priests. The proletarian slogan must be: civil war," Lenin stated.¹⁹ His objective was global class conflict, and the bloodshed unleashed by the revolution quickly spiraled into the devastating civil war Lenin desired. The Russian Civil War was incredibly brutal: somewhere between two and three million Russians died, killed in combat or political violence, starved to death by famine, or claimed by cold, infection, or disease. The vast majority of the conflict's casualties were civilians, and this bloodletting uprooted millions more, who left their lives behind them to flee abroad.²⁰

The beginnings of Allied involvement in Russia were complicated. At first, no one wanted to get entangled in internal Russian affairs. Outside of Russia, Lenin, the Bolsheviks, and their goals and origins, remained an enigma. Conservative Allied generals and politicians regarded the revolutionaries with disgust for their socialist politics and their opposition to the

¹⁷ St. Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1914 in a bout of anti-German sentiment. In 1924 it changed to Leningrad.

¹⁸ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 6. Russia used the Old Style Julian Calendar in 1917, under which the Bolshevik Revolution occurred on 25 October 1917 and is thus called the October Revolution. The Soviets adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1918.

¹⁹ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

war, but as of 1917 the chief goal for Britain and France was winning the war against Germany, not reversing a revolution in Russia. In 1915, the Allied powers had agreed in the Treaty of London not to make a separate peace with the Central Powers, and so long as there was still hope that the Bolsheviks would abide by this pact and not make peace, it would be unwise to break contact with them. British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour issued a memorandum in December 1917 warning against alienating the new Russian government and driving it into the hands of the Germans. Britain, Balfour thought, should "avoid, as long as possible, an open breach with this crazy system."²¹ More pragmatically, however, Balfour believed that the government should work with any Russian faction that opposed the Germans. "Internal affairs in Russia are no concern of ours," he wrote, "We only consider them in so far as they affect the war."²² Therefore the Allies took a dual course in Russia, maintaining at the same time tenuous contact with the Bolsheviks while opening ties to Russian groups opposed to the revolution which advocated for Russia to stay in the war.

The hope that Lenin might prove amenable turned out to be wishful thinking. The Bolshevik leader made it clear that he had no intention of repeating Kerensky's mistake by continuing the war against Germany, and issued a "Decree of Peace" on November 8, one day after taking power, promoting an armistice with the Central Powers on all fronts, and forcing the Allies to face the prospect of Russia dropping out of the war. Even the Provisional Government's ramshackle effort on the Eastern Front had kept millions of German and Austro-Hungarian troops occupied. If Russia made peace, these enemy soldiers, plus hundreds of thousands of released prisoners of war, could be shifted westwards to France and Belgium at a particularly bad time: In the autumn of 1917, France's armies were drained and demoralized, the

²¹ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs, 1918* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 112.

²² Richard Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921, Vol. I: Intervention and the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 74.

Italians had just been routed at Caporetto, and Britain, whose own army had been seriously mauled in the Passchendaele offensive, was increasingly bearing the burdens of the war. America had finally joined the Entente powers that spring, but it would be a long time before American soldiers arrived on front in big enough numbers to make up for the loss of Russia's army. Meanwhile, the Central Powers could lessen the effects of the British blockade by exploiting Russian resources and foodstuffs. Capping off this strategic nightmare was the fact that during the war, the Allies had shipped tons of war material to Russia, but due to the chaotic and inefficient Russian logistics system, most of these supplies had simply been left in the ports where they were unloaded. British generals cringed at the thought of "Fritz" getting his hands on these vital war goods.²³

To make matters worse, the Bolshevik government repudiated past Russian debts. Imperial Russia had first sought foreign loans in the late nineteenth century to help industrialize and stabilize the currency. Sergei Witte, Russia's Minister of Finance from 1892 to 1903, had increased borrowing to the point that Russia became dependent on foreign capital, particularly from French investors. Britain followed suit during the First World War, pouring money into its Russian ally to keep its war effort afloat. In total, the British credited Russia for loans of 5.1 billion rubles during the war, and the French for a further 1.34 billion on top of their pre-war lending. Lenin railed against these foreign debts, and the Bolsheviks seized private property in the territory they controlled, nationalizing industry without compensation for factory owners, even confiscating private bank accounts.²⁴ A diplomatic attack followed on November 23 when Leon Trotsky, the Bolshevik Foreign Minister, published secret treaties that had been made

²³ Ullman, *Intervention & the War*, 87.

²⁴ Jennifer Siegel, *For Peace and Money: French and British Finance in the Service of Tsars and Commissars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 168.

between Russia and its allies. By the end of their first month in power, the Bolsheviks had very few friends left in the Allied governments.²⁵

At the beginning of World War I, Britain and France had sent liaison officers to Russia to coordinate Allied war strategy. Now, in 1917, the British and French military missions watched aghast as the Russian Army they had helped for several years disintegrated in mutiny while the new Russian government made peace with the mortal enemy. On November 22, the Bolshevik government ordered the Russian Army to send out peace feelers to the Germans. Two days later the British and French military attachés protested jointly to the Russian High Command, *Stavka*, urging it not to make peace with Germany. But it became clear just how little authority the Imperial Russian brass had left when a mob of soldiers and sailors murdered General Dukhonin, the Russian commander-in-chief, on December 3, bayoneting him to death and using his body for target practice.²⁶ The Allied military missions viewed the Bolsheviks as enemies, to the point of believing that disguised German staff officers directed the soviets, and that German soldiers manned Bolshevik armored trains and artillery. Lenin, of course, had been smuggled into Russia by the Germans as a way of causing internal havoc, but he and the Bolshevik Party acted entirely in their own interest, not as German pawns.²⁷

The Allied generals withdrew from Moscow and Petrograd as the Bolsheviks seized the cities, and went home to lobby their governments to intervene in Russia. Just after the October Revolution, a British agent named Bruce Lockhart embarked on a diplomatic mission to the Bolshevik government in Moscow. Initially favorable to the Bolsheviks, scenes of political repression and revolutionary terror Russia appalled Lockhart, and he telegraphed a report of the

²⁵ "Diary of Russian Affairs from the Revolution to Peace with Germany, n.d.," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, vol. I, (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1984), 2215.

²⁶ "Diary of Russian Affairs from the Revolution to Peace with Germany, n.d.," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

situation back to his superiors in London in which he included his recommendations on how to deal with the Bolsheviks. He identified three options on how to proceed: either withdraw completely from Russia and come to terms with the Bolshevik regime, send limited support in cash and supplies to the Whites, enough to allow them a "fair fight" versus the Reds, or intervene in strength, with at least 50,000 British troops in Siberia, and nip Bolshevism in the bud. Of these, Lockhart stated that option two was clearly the worst; he doubted the Whites could win the war on their own without massive support from Britain, and limited support could only prolong the bloodshed before a Red victory. Rather option three: crush the Bolsheviks with British might.²⁸

Though Lockhart advocated for intervention, his nuanced view attracted a withering barrage of criticism from British generals like Sir Alfred Knox, Britain's wartime military attaché to the Russian Army, who could not stomach even the suggestion of leaving the revolutionary regime to its own devices. Lockhart and Knox exchanged venomous letters, with the latter even implicating that Lenin and Trotsky had poisoned Lockhart's mind with communist propaganda while he was in Moscow. "Civilization demands we intervene in Russia," clamored Knox to anyone in the government who would listen.²⁹ He found a willing ear in Lord Robert Cecil, the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who mentioned sending Knox overseas to stir up support for an armed intervention in Russia, and that, "[he] would be glad to see General Knox go to America to state his views with first-hand knowledge."³⁰ French officers championed intervention too, including the commander of the French military mission in Petrograd, Maurice

²⁸ "Mr. Lockhart to Mr. Balfour, November 7, 1918," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 44.

²⁹ Jonathon Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak 1918-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 75.

³⁰ "Summary of Correspondence &c., Concerning Allied Intervention in East Russia, June 21, 1918," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 31.

Janin, who returned to Paris to chair a commission dedicated to preparing the way for action in Russia.³¹

Despite Lenin's proclamation of peace, the Germans continued their eastward advance into the Russian Empire, realizing the Entente Powers' worst fears. Several Allied politicians and military men even suggested working with the Bolsheviks if they could be made to fight back against the Germans, and Joseph Noulens, the French ambassador, despite being staunchly opposed to the revolution, offered military aid in case of a German attack. Nevertheless, most of the Allied military attaches could not help but watch with relish as the German army swept away poorly armed "Bolshevik bands".³² When Germany ceased preliminary negotiations with the Bolshevik government in February, the Allies, except for the United States, approved of sending military aid. With Lenin's agreement, a small force of Royal Marines landed at Murmansk, in Russia's extreme northwest, on March 6, 1918. For the moment, the Allies worked with both Bolsheviks and anti-Bolsheviks against the Germans.³³

This brief period of cooperation ended later that month, when the Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk, on March 15th, 1918.³⁴ Lenin also took the opportunity to conclusively repudiate Russian foreign debts to the Allies. Yet for all their fearsome rhetoric, the Bolshevik position in Russia was shaky. Lockhart estimated that the Red Army only had some 213,000 soldiers in total in November 1918, most of them untrained Red Guards and mutinous soldiers.³⁵ The Reds controlled the central region of Russia, an area stretching roughly from Petrograd in the north to the Caspian in the south, and from just west of Moscow to the Ural mountains. This "red zone" contained European Russia's most important

³¹ John Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 12.

³² Bradley, *Allied Intervention*, 20.

³³ David Watson, "Britain, France, and the Russian Civil War," 94.

³⁴ Bradley, *Allied Intervention*, 32.

³⁵ "Memorandum on the Internal Situation in Russia, November 7, 1918" *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 37.

cities and centers of production, as well as the majority of the population, but countless enemies lurked in the peripheries. Relations incurably breached with the Bolsheviks, Britain and France turned to those opposed them. Many Russians refused to accept the legitimacy of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk or the Bolshevik government imposed in October. The Bolsheviks' opponents contained representatives of a large spectrum of Russian society, from monarchists and liberals to members of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, the SRs, on the far left. The anti-Bolsheviks, spread throughout Russia, were not one unified bloc, coalescing instead under a large number of independent governments and warlords fighting together as the White Movement,³⁶ unified by their opposition to the communist Reds. The Don Cossacks rose up first, in February 1918, and by the spring of that year an organized White military composed of ex-Tsarist officers appeared in South Russia, a force named the Volunteer Army and led by General Anton Denikin.³⁷ Furthermore, the subject peoples of the Russian empire, like the Ukrainians, the Poles, and the Finns, among others, took the opportunity to declare their independence, fighting their own wars of national liberation.³⁸

The treaty of Brest-Litovsk came as a crushing blow to the Entente alliance, but the Allied leadership did not give up its plans to fight in Russia. Lloyd George assessed the situation in the aftermath of Brest-Litovsk in his memoirs: "Although the Bolshevik Government of

³⁶ The title came from the color of the flag of France's Bourbon monarchy. The Reds compared the Whites to the French counter-revolutionaries, but the anti-Bolsheviks groups proudly adopted the moniker; Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 8.

³⁷ Lincoln, *Red Victory*, 18.

³⁸ There was no lack of colorfully-named factions in the Russian Civil War. Armed groups of peasants opposed to both sides came to be known as the Greens, while anarchist militias became the Blacks, including the Ukrainian anarchist army led by the infamous Nestor Makhno. A rebellion in Tambov against the Bolsheviks was dubbed the Blue Army, and countless gangs of bandits and deserters fought whomever and switched sides as it suited them. Many Russians were entirely swept up into events. Anton Ovchinnikov, a teenager from the Siberian town of Ufa, started his war in 1918 fighting against the Bolsheviks after being conscripted into the Czech Legion, then becoming a soldier in Admiral Kolchak's White Army, before ending the war in 1920 as a Red partisan fighting against Kolchak.

A.V. Ovchinnikov, "Memoirs of the Red Partisan Movement in the Russian Far East", in *The Testimony of Kolchak and Other Siberian Materials*, ed. Elena Varneck and H.H. Fisher, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1935), 265. Lincoln, 468.

Russia had deserted the Entente and signed a separate peace with Germany, it was obvious in these circumstances that the Entente could not abandon Russia to the domination of Germany. We could not acquiesce in the vast accession of strength which Prussian Imperialism stood to gain from its treaty spoils... If Germany succeeded in provisioning itself freely from these sources, the whole effect of our blockade would be lost."³⁹

Since the Bolsheviks would not fight the Germans, the Allies furnished the anti-Bolshevik Whites with weapons and military advisors. They gained a particularly tempting avenue of intervention in May 1918, when the revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion commenced. During World War I, the Russians formed the Czechoslovak Legion from Czech and Slovak prisoners of war eager to switch sides and fight for national independence by turning their guns on the Austro-Hungarian army.⁴⁰ One of the few military formations that fought well under Kerensky's Provisional government, the Czechs disavowed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and wanted to continue fighting the Central Powers, declaring their loyalty to the Supreme Allied Council in France. Lenin came to an agreement with the Allies for half the Czech legionnaires to be transported to Vladivostok, where they would be shipped all the way around the world to France, to fight on the Western Front. Over 50,000 Czechs, loyal to the Allied Powers, chugged along the railroad tracks for 5,000 miles between the Volga and the Pacific in the spring of 1918. The British military, however, believed the Czechs had more potential to be a decisive factor by staying in Russia and fighting the Germans there, rather than going to France.⁴¹

Britain got its way soon enough. In the town of Chelyabinsk in May 1918, a train carrying a unit of Czechs came to a stop at dawn alongside another train, full of Hungarian

³⁹ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs, 1918*, 151.

⁴⁰ Serge Petroff, *Remembering a Forgotten War: Civil War in Eastern European Russia and Siberia, 1918-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 2.

⁴¹ Bradley, *Allied Intervention*, 72.

POWs being repatriated home. The two trainloads of former enemies hurled curses at one another, but when the Hungarian train pulled away to leave, one of the POWs chucked a piece of an iron stove at a group of Czechs standing near the train tracks, striking one of the legionnaires on the head. While their comrade lay bleeding on the ground, the Czechs halted the Hungarian train and demanded, rifles in hand, that the culprit be handed over. They lynched the miscreant on the spot, in sight of his vanishing comrades on the departing train.⁴² When a platoon of Red Guards came to arrest the Czech killers, the legionnaires refused to comply.⁴³ Trotsky was enraged by the news and demanded that the Czechs be disarmed immediately on May 25. When the Czech legionnaires received word of Trotsky's order, and that he had also declared that Czechs found with weapons would be shot on sight, they overpowered and disarmed the garrison of Red Guards at Chelyabinsk. Other Czech units, smattered all over Russia along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, started to seize adjacent towns and prepared to fight their way through the Red Army to Vladivostok.⁴⁴

The Czechs offered the perfect vehicle for Allied intervention in Russia. Lord Cecil suggested in a conversation with Clemenceau to use the Czech Legion as a ready-made Allied army in Russia to reconstitute the Eastern Front.⁴⁵ The Czech imbroglio also undermined President Wilson's opposition to intervention, because it was felt the Allies now had a duty to help the Czechs, who had pledged allegiance to the Allied cause. Britain wanted to fight the Germans, not the Bolsheviks, but it would fight the Reds to help the Czechs break through to safety if it had to. Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, said that at least

⁴² Peter Fleming, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak* (Suffolk: Richard Clay & Co., Ltd., 1964), 18.

⁴³ Fleming, 3.

⁴⁴ Petroff, 9.

⁴⁵ Ullman, *Intervention and the War*, 170.

eight additional Allied battalions were needed to help the Czechs.⁴⁶ The Japanese agreed to help, pouring troops into Siberia, but they had in fact simply used aiding the Czech Legion as an excuse to occupy the Russian Far East, and Japanese soldiers did not go far to the west at all or help out the Czechs in combat. Nevertheless, it soon became apparent that the Czechs had managed quite fine by themselves, pushing the Reds out of Siberia, a success that offered new and exciting opportunities to the British and definitively ended any thoughts of settling with the Bolsheviks. The Bolshevik government's placating attitude towards the Germans had earned them increased distrust from the British government. In a letter, Balfour mused that Lenin and Trotsky acted as if they were German agents. To the planners of the Allied intervention, German and Bolshevik became synonymous terms. The Czech Legion now became a vehicle for that intervention, which meant fighting the Bolsheviks as well.⁴⁷

The Czech revolt had the added side effect of goading anti-Bolshevik groups in eastern Russia into action, shielding them from attack as they organized. Buffered as such by the Czechs, two centers of anti-Bolshevik resistance sprang up in eastern Russia in the city of Samara, on the Volga, and in Omsk, in Siberia.⁴⁸ The Czech revolt and the subsequent formation of White regimes in eastern Russia meant that a ring of anti-Bolshevik governments now surrounded the Bolshevik heartland, from Samara and Omsk in the east, to the Don Cossacks and General Denikin's Volunteer Army in the South, and to nationalist governments all along the borderlands from Finland, to Ukraine, to the Caucasus and the region around the Caspian Sea. Besides the Japanese, who had no interest in marching west to fight the Germans, the only Allied force in Russia was the small group of British marines that had landed in Murmansk in March.

⁴⁶Ibid., 259.

⁴⁷ "Balfour to Reading, Washington, 26 April 1918," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: Russia, 1918*, vol. II, (Washington: G.P.O., 1937), 140.

⁴⁸ Ullman, *Intervention and the War*, 274.

However, on August 2, 1918, a larger British expeditionary force under the command of General F.C. Poole landed at the port city of Archangel in North Russia to defend the region from German forces stationed in Finland and keep British war material from falling into their hands, as well as to give the Czechs a way out of Russia if they needed it. The idea for the landing at Archangel had been Poole's, who advised the government to do so, and to whom the War Cabinet conceded, "with a view to prevent further emergencies".⁴⁹

General F.C. Poole had been the British Army's advisor to the Russian artillery service during the First World War. Still in country after the revolution, he became a fervent apostle of intervention, travelling and observing developments with his staff, developing a circle of British officers committed to action in Russia. One of his subalterns, a Lieutenant Lessing, was reported to be involved in secret political meetings in Moscow, "working on some policy unknown to us", according to a British diplomat. "This is one of Poole's brave boys", responded the Director of Military Intelligence, apparently unconcerned that a mere lieutenant was involved in making high-level military planning. Poole and his cohort did not wait for plans to filter down to them from London; instead, they made them on the spot. When the Czech Legion's revolt decided Britain on intervention in Russia, the government turned to Poole for advice. He suggested an occupation of Archangel, and the War Cabinet duly made Poole head of the operation.⁵⁰ In his 1998 article, Millman recorded the directions given to Poole by the British military:

1. To effect the removal of British war materials and personnel from Russia;
2. to prevent the Germans from mobilizing the war resources of Russia;
3. to carry away from Russia the Czech Legion, then attempting to wend its way towards the northern ports on the Trans-Siberian railway;
4. to defend the Murmansk coast against a potential Germano-Finn advance.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Millman, 309.

⁵⁰ Millman, "The Problem with Generals", 310.

⁵¹ Ibid., 311.

David R. Francis, the American ambassador to Russia, wired to Washington his understanding that the occupation would be limited to helping the Czechs: "British Intelligence, Moscow, claims to know... three trainloads of German prisoners of war clothed in Russian uniforms were from Smolensk district to Penza to fight Czechs... military conference Paris, June 3, decided to hold Murman first, then Archangel, if impossible simultaneously, and to land battalions American, British, French, Italian troops with necessary munitions and provisions to hold these ports..."⁵² Francis repeated here the claim that the Bolsheviks used German troops to fight, a misconception that contributed to the beginning of conflict between them and the Allies. In his memoirs, Lloyd George described the initial objectives of the intervention, in Archangel and elsewhere, as similarly limited. "To prevent the military stores at Murmansk, Archangel, and Vladivostok falling into enemy hands; to succour the Czecho-Slovak troops in the Urals and Vladivostok, and enable them to reconstitute an anti-German front in combination with the pro-Ally Cossacks and other Nationalist forces in Russia, or to withdraw safely and join the Allied forces in the West."⁵³

Clearly, Lloyd George and the British high command had it in mind that Allied troops would defend the stores at Archangel, while Czech and Russian soldiers fought in the front lines against the Germans. Poole, however, acted aggressively in North Russia from the get-go, pursuing and fighting Bolshevik forces far outside the city as a part of an unplanned war effort against Moscow. The Allied force led by Poole that landed in Archangel in August 1918 was small and multinational, only 1,500 strong, composed of British soldiers and Royal Marines, a French colonial battalion, and fifty American sailors. It had help seizing the city from a fifth column led by a Tsarist naval officer, Captain Grigori Chaplin, which turned out the local soviet

⁵² "The Ambassador in Russia (Francis) to the Secretary of State," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, 211.

⁵³ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs, 1918*, 155.

when the Allied force landed. With the help of Chaplin's officers, Archangel was quickly and bloodlessly secured, while throngs of local peasants and bourgeoisie hailed the disembarking troops as liberators.⁵⁴ Poole chose an elderly Russian Socialist-Revolutionary, Nikolai Chaikovsky, to head the pro-Allied Provisional Government of North Russia.⁵⁵ Chaikovsky, at seventy-years old, had a seasoned revolutionary career: he had been imprisoned for years under the Tsarist government, spent time abroad attempting to establish socialist utopias in England and the United States, and been elected to the Constituent Assembly of the Provisional Government in 1917. Chaplin became commander of Archangel's White Guards.⁵⁶

Poole's gunboats pursued the Bolsheviks inland for several miles on the day of the landing, coming into contact with their reinforcements. Poole sent ground troops upriver in support.⁵⁷ By August 23, Francis wrote that some of the Allied troops had advanced 100 miles south on the Vologda railroad, and others, supported by the gunboats, had gone 200 miles up the Dvina River. With only 1,500 troops and despite orders only to guard supplies in Archangel, Poole extended his zone of action to an area larger than the size of England within weeks of the landing. Furthermore, he anticipated further British and American reinforcements to continue to drive the Bolsheviks back, and to create a northern junction with the Czech Legion and the other White governments in Russia.⁵⁸

Why did Poole reinterpret his orders to safeguard Archangel as a blank check to fight the Reds throughout Northern Russia? Unable to fight the Germans directly, Poole viewed fighting the Bolsheviks as his second-best option. This was hardly surprising, since Allied military

⁵⁴ "The Consul at Archangel (Cole) to the Secretary of State, The Consul at Archangel (Cole) to the Sec of State, August 6, 1918," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, 511.

⁵⁵ "Mr. Lindley to Earl Curzon, Report of the Work of the British Mission to North Russia from June 1918 to 31st March, 1919, April 25, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 141.

⁵⁶ "Mr. Lindley to Earl Curzon, April 25, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* 141.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵⁸ "The Ambassador in Russia (Francis) to the Secretary of State, August 23, 1918," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, 513.

circles had equated the Germans and the Bolsheviks since Brest-Litovsk, and generals, like Poole, had by now effectively convinced themselves of their own claims that the Bolsheviks were merely German agents. Poole told Francis that the Red forces his men were battling must be officered by Germans, "as none but experienced men could [handle] machine and aerial guns with which the enemy seems to be equipped."⁵⁹ To the Americans, who were loath to get involved in Russian politics, the British general echoed the same sentiment: "...President Wilson should understand that fighting Bolsheviks was not fighting Russians but Germans as Bolsheviks indissolubly linked with Germans as demonstrated in every engagement."⁶⁰ By autumn, Poole's mission had raised 9,000 White Russian soldiers for his anti-Bolshevik war, not counting allied irregulars, plus another 3,000 volunteers for a special "Slavo-British" Legion, equipped and led by British officers and NCOs.⁶¹

Poole's latent anti-Bolshevism was evident among his friends as well as his enemies when he clashed heads with the government he appointed in Archangel. Chaikovsky protested that Allied soldiers did whatever they wanted, and informed his government afterwards. "It is unnecessary," wrote E.W. Birse, the British Commissioner in Russia, unsympathetically, "to recount all the complaints which M. Tcahykovsky [*sic*] poured into the ears of the diplomatic representatives on their arrival. Many of them were frivolous, and only served to illustrate the extreme difficulty of dealing with his Government."⁶² The British created most of the tension, however, first by banning the red Socialist-Revolutionary flag, and then appointing a French colonel, Donop, as military governor of the town, to the displeasure of the Russians.⁶³ Donop

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "The Ambassador in Russia (Francis) to the Secretary of State, August 23, 1918," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, 540.

⁶¹ Report on the Work of the British Mission to North Russia from June 1918 to 31st March, 1919", British Documents on Foreign Affairs, 147.

⁶² "Mr. Lindley to Earl Curzon, April 25, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 141.

⁶³ Ibid..

completely ignored Chaikovksy's government, taking justice into his own hands, which included posting warnings around town threatening the death penalty to citizens spreading Bolshevik propaganda or found in possession of stolen state property. Even Birse had to sheepishly admit that "the notice should never have been posted without consulting the civil authorities and was couched in language out of harmony with Russian law and tradition."⁶⁴ Poole hardly compromised with his Russian allies; instead, he treated Archangel and the surrounding territories like a conquered, or a colonial territory. The American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, wrote a concerned note to the American ambassador in Britain, alleging that "The Department has received most disturbing reports concerning the high-handed methods taken by General Poole with the local government at Archangel, whose authority he apparently ignores. The natural effect upon the Russian people will be to arouse resentment and possibly open hostility...". Poole only abated when President Wilson threatened to withdraw American troops from Archangel.⁶⁵

Lansing proved correct when Chaikovsky took a shot at Poole by sacking the Russian town commandment, who worked with the French military governor, prompting Francis Lindley, the British Chargé d'Affaires, to write that the government of Archangel and Poole were openly conflicted to the point of damaging the war effort. With Poole's tacit consent, Captain Chaplin, the Russian commander of Archangel's White forces, planned a coup d'état to oust Chaikovksy's and the SRs in charge. "[Poole] replied that he would be neutral, as it was a matter of internal Russian politics."⁶⁶ On the night of September 5, Chaplin's troops kidnapped the members of the Archangel government and imprisoned them in a seaside monastery. During an American military parade the next morning, word got out, and the townspeople staged a general strike.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁶⁵ Silverlight, *Victors' Dilemma*, 75.

⁶⁶ "Mr. Lindley to Earl Curzon, April 25, 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 141.

American soldiers operated the city streetcars for the next few days . Eventually the matter was sorted out: the government returned, Chaplin resigned, and the strike ended.⁶⁷ But as a result of Poole's imperious attitude and dislike for socialists, the relationship between the Allies and the Whites in Archangel had withered quickly. The Allied intervention in Archangel was only a few weeks old, "but the result was that the cordial relations which should have existed between the Russian authorities and the Allied military command, upon whose assistance they depended, gave place to an attitude of mutual suspicion and a policy of pin-pricks."⁶⁸

Poole clashed violently with the Russian government in Archangel, and flagrantly pushed the boundaries of his original orders. In short, he provides a perfect example of the "general-on-the-spot", where an Allied general in Russia allowed his anti-communist feelings to reinterpret limited orders as justification for an all-out war on the Bolsheviks, who he viewed more as German mercenaries than an independent movement, and which led him to antagonize his socialist allies. Why did Poole find it so easy to chart his own course in North Russia? The answer was simple: because he received no direction from higher-ups. British diplomats wrote home to London, but London's responses were strikingly indefinite, and merely acquiesced to whatever course of action Poole proposed. Chief of the Imperial General Staff General Wilson composed a short narrative of the North Russia campaign at the end of 1919, in which he conceded as much. "The Allied Governments consequently found themselves committed to the retention of their contingents at Archangel throughout the winter, although they had not then decided on any definite policy with regards to the Bolsheviks; nor have they from that day to this."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid., 143.

⁶⁸ "Mr. Lindley to Earl Curzon, April 25, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* 142.

⁶⁹ "The Campaign in North Russia, 1919. Memorandum by Chief of the Imperial General Staff, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 418.

Intransigence and American complaints finally led to Poole's dismissal in late October 1918. He headed off to South Russia, where he commanded British planes and tanks fighting alongside General Denikin's Volunteer Army.⁷⁰ His recently-arrived chief-of-staff, General Ironside, replaced him as commander, but Ironside could not reverse the course of the Archangel operation.⁷¹ Poole, during his tenure in charge, had expanded a small command of 1,500 Allied soldiers to over 18,000, started a shooting war between the Entente and the Bolsheviks 170 miles deep into the heart of northern Russia, and raised a White Russian army and a government that had to be propped up. The British government had never decided to intervene in force in North Russia; Poole did. Poole continued to increase the scope of his mission until literally his final days in command. In September 1918, he dispatched two officers to Paris to meet with Allied leaders and demand ten more battalions. On October 10, a month and one day from the German surrender, Poole warned London that he feared an imminent attack from the Germans in Finland, and asked for more troops. By this time the port in Archangel had started to freeze over, and only one more battalion arrived.⁷² Anglo-American relations chilled as well due to the way Poole dragged American troops deeper into the Russian quagmire. The Americans wanted to be as little involved in Russia as they could, yet after Chaplin's aborted coup, American soldiers were operating street cars in the Archangel boulevards. Balfour grumbled to his colleagues that "the Americans have it in their heads that we wished to push them into policies they didn't like, and the unfortunate mistake recently committed by General Poole at Archangel has rather confirmed them in this impression."⁷³

⁷⁰ "The Chargé in Russia (Poole) to the Secretary of State, November 18, 1918," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, 569.

⁷¹ Silverlight, *Victors' Dilemma*, 77.

⁷² "Campaign in North Russia, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 442.

⁷³ Silverlight, *Victor's Dilemma*, 78.

Ironside, Poole's successor, had only arrived from France a few days before, and he was shocked at the situation left to him. The American diplomat Francis wrote that the troops were "exhausted from continuous service", outnumbered and ill-supplied, but that Ironside showed energy in trying to improve the position, and had made a favorable impression on Chaikovksy's government.⁷⁴ The new British general faced still faced many obstacles, however, and got another one when the Germans signed the Armistice in November and ended the war. Ironside's troops were strung out for hundreds of miles along the Dvina river and the railroad, and growing increasingly discontented with their lot. One thousand Russian White soldiers refused to parade on October 31, protesting that the British and American troops received better rations. The Allied troops complained in their turn when they heard news of the Armistice, "officers and men inquire why military operations are necessary against the Bolsheviks."⁷⁵ With the end of the war against Germany, the Archangel expedition, indeed the whole intervention in Russia, had become unnecessary, and unpopular both with the troops, who wanted to be demobilized, and the public in Britain, who wanted them back home. As one British candidate standing for the General Election that December asked: "What are our boys doing in Russia?"⁷⁶

The Allies had to press on, regardless, because the campaign had too much momentum to stop. The winter froze Allied troops into place at the frontlines and literally froze the port, preventing reinforcement by sea, while strategically the Allies could not withdraw without abandoning the White government they had created. "The prevention of our anti-German policy had involved us in obligations to those loyal Russians who had remained true to the Allied cause and had thereby compromised themselves with the Soviet Government," wrote Wilson. "We

⁷⁴ "The Ambassador in Russia (Francis) to the Secretary of State, October 23, 1918," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, 561.

⁷⁵ "The Ambassador in Russia (Francis) to the Secretary of State, November 13, 1918," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, 506.

⁷⁶ Silverlight, *Victors' Dilemma*, ix.

could not precipitately abandon these without doing our utmost to ensure their subsequent safety."⁷⁷ The overly-extended frontline Poole had created in North Russia also meant that withdrawal would be a tactical nightmare, a grueling 170-mile retreat back to the port.

The change of command from Poole to Ironside illustrated how the nature of Allied campaigns in Russia depended on the character of their general. Young for his position at only 38 years-old, Ironside continued to prove a more thoughtful commander than Poole, visiting with his troops at the front line and the locals behind it. His reading of the situation in North Russia was very pessimistic, however. He lambasted drunkenness and poor discipline in both the Russian and Allied contingents, and although he drilled and tried to organize a model Russian fighting force, he doubted the chances of the campaign. "We were a tiny army of not very first-class troops," he wrote, "sitting on the edge of Russia's vast territory, in which was being fought a bitter civil war." Speaking with local Russians, he discovered that few fostered much support of the White government in Archangel.⁷⁸ Ironside cautiously guarded his lines, but made no further attacks, and spent most of his time trying to bolster faltering morale among his soldiers and the Russians. The focal points of the war moved elsewhere, particularly to Siberia, where, on November 14, 1918, just days after the armistice, a Tsarist naval officer named Admiral Kolchak took over control of the anti-Bolshevik war effort in the city of Omsk, declaring himself the commander of all White forces. The Archangel government recognized Kolchak's authority, but because of the distance between them and Omsk did not go beyond paying nominal homage.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ "Campaign in North Russia, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 418.

⁷⁸ Silverlight, *Victors' Dilemma*, 177.

⁷⁹ "The Chargé in Russia (Cole) to the Acting Secretary of State, June 20, 1919," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, 633.

On January 18, 1919, the heads of the Entente Powers convened in Paris to start working out the Treaty of Versailles. The Russian imbroglio was one of the chief points earmarked for discussion. Four days earlier, the Russian intervention had gained a clamorous spokesman when Winston Churchill took over as Secretary of State for War. He cabled Ironside the same day: "Immediate attention is being given by me to the difficulties of your situation. Decisions must be taken within a few days by Great Powers in Paris, and whatever policy is adopted will be carried out vigorously."⁸⁰ But neither Churchill nor the Allied heads of state found any easy solutions to Russia. "It is not our fault," told Lloyd George to Churchill, "if no decision has been arrived at. The views of five powers have to be taken into account."⁸¹

On January 23, 1919, the Allied Powers proposed a peace conference between Reds and Whites at the island of Prinkipo in the Sea of Marmara.⁸² The Bolsheviks accepted the invitation, but this measure of recognition extended to the Bolshevik government so offended the Whites that they unanimously rejected the proposal. The Prinkipo idea also revealed the huge gap between the officers on the ground in Russia and the politicians at home. "It is not necessary to reproduce here all the arguments against acceptance enumerated in the reply," wrote Lindley, the British Commissioner in Archangel about the Whites' rejection of the peace conference, "it is sufficient to say that the Provisional Government of the Northern Region categorically refused to parley with the murderers of their friends and relations and the destroyers of their country and their religion..."⁸³ After the failure of the Prinkipo proposal, the British government gave precious little further direction to Ironside, as Wilson confessed in his memorandum at the end of 1919: "The outstanding feature of this year's operations has been the difficulty imposed on the

⁸⁰ Silverlight, *Victors' Dilemma*, 186.

⁸¹ Silverlight, *Victors' Dilemma*, 188.

⁸² Ullman, *Britain and the Russian Civil War*, 110.

⁸³ "Mr. Lindley to Earl Curzon, April 25, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 146.

military authorities, both in the theatre of operations and at home, by the absence of any clearly defined policy or direction on the part of the Allied Governments."⁸⁴

By the spring of 1919, Allied and White forces in Archangel had swelled to over 32,000, but Ironside wrote that overextension and poor morale had made his job almost impossible.⁸⁵ Most of his British, French, and American soldiers hoped to be demobilized soon, and did not want to risk their lives in what seemed to be a pointless Russian sideshow; on February 26, a British battalion refused to go to the frontlines. Russian soldiers deserted in large numbers. On February 24, Washington telegraphed the American consul in Archangel and told him that they were sending two railway companies to help withdraw American soldiers as soon as the port unfroze.⁸⁶ Support for the intervention in Britain, meanwhile, had plummeted. "We were drawing terribly near to the end of our tether as an efficient fighting force," disclosed Ironside in his memoirs.⁸⁷

The British War Cabinet decided to withdraw Allied troops from North Russia on April 15, 1919. Ironside received orders at the beginning of May to launch a final offensive blow with the aim of stunning the Reds, hopefully giving the Allied soldiers breathing room for the withdrawal and leaving the North Russian Provisional Government in an advantageous position to carry on the war alone, so that the Allies could not be accused of leaving their allies in the lurch. This offensive, however coincided with the apogee of the White war effort in Siberia, and British hopes briefly surged. Ironside, lifted from his usual gloom, hoped to link up with Kolchak's army coming from the east, and sent them some ammunition and weapons. The

⁸⁴ "Campaign in North Russia, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 418.

⁸⁵ "From the Chargé in Russia (Poole) to the Acting Secretary of State, January 24, 1919," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, 608.

⁸⁶ "The Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in Russia (Poole), February 24, 1919," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, 617.

⁸⁷ Silverlight, *Victors' Dilemma*, 187.

Americans and French evacuated North Russia on June 11, as well as all of the British troops who had been fighting since 1918, but in their place, Ironside received two brigades of reinforcements from Britain, comprised of men who had specifically volunteered for overseas service. Months of training the Provisional Government's army seemed to have paid off as well, for Ironside believed it was trained and motivated enough to take part in an attack. The original purpose for the planned British offensive was to distract the Reds while Allied soldiers withdrew from Russia, but now Ironside wanted to use his new troops to try and defeat the Red Army in the north altogether.⁸⁸

Despite the fact that it had cabled Ironside to tell him to withdraw, the War Cabinet approved Ironside's more aggressive plan, as usual, allowing the "general-on-the-spot" to call the shots even when it conflicted with prior planning. "Ironside insists that he is without definite instructions from London", telegraphed the US consul, "but there seems to have been approval of the plan... to advance on [Kotlas] as promptly as possible."⁸⁹ Unfortunately for Ironside, his seemingly-dependable Russian troops, many of them recruited from among Bolshevik POWs, revolted in July. The rioting White soldiers murdered several British officers before deserting to the Bolsheviks en masse. His evanescent confidence all but gone, Ironside advised London that either he required extensive reinforcements or immediate withdrawal.⁹⁰ Chaikovksy's Provisional Government begged the British not to leave, but George Curzon, the Foreign Secretary after Balfour, adopting Ironside's pessimism, responded curtly that the "Altered

⁸⁸ "Campaign in North Russia, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 417- 418.

⁸⁹ "The Chargé in Russia (Poole) to the Acting Secretary of State, April 15, 1919," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, 628.

⁹⁰ "The Ambassador in Great Britain (Davis) to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1919," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, 641.

situation on Northern Front leaves no alternative to His Majesty's Government but to proceed with as little delay as possible with already accepted policy of evacuation."⁹¹

Ironside's attack still went ahead on August 10, smashing the Bolshevik positions arrayed against Archangel and allowing the withdrawal to take place without a hitch, making the 170-mile retreat back to the city probably the best-conducted operation in the entire Allied intervention in Russia. By September 27, British forces had returned the 170 miles to Archangel, where they embarked ships back to Britain. The citizens of Archangel and White Army soldiers, left to battle on alone, shot resentful looks at the British troops boarding the boats to safety. General Miller, the commander of the city's White Guards, bravely announced his intention to continue the fight, which he did until Archangel was conquered by the advancing Red Army in February 1920.⁹²

The North Russia operation began with a small plan to guard war supplies in Archangel, and ended a year later after a bitter military campaign and hundreds of Allied casualties. During this whole time, the British government never formulated a concrete plan, a fact that Ironside complained about constantly. General Wilson presciently noted that due to "the want of a clear-cut policy during this period," the planning for the Allied intervention had been left to officers on the ground, with painful consequences. "In these circumstances the action of our Commanders on the spot has been dictated largely by the exigencies of the immediate situation on their front, which itself has been continually changing, thereby adding still further to their difficulties." The generals could also cause difficulties themselves, as Poole had done by being the one to expand the scope of the Archangel campaign beyond its original purpose. Wilson wrote that the one

⁹¹ "Earl Curzon to Mr. Hoare (Archangel) July 24, 1919," *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, vol. II, (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1949), 455.

⁹² "Campaign in North Russia, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 421; Silverlight, 352.

"great lesson" to learn from it all was that military operations which started out small could end up sucking in more and more resources over time: "It began with the landing of 150 marines at Murmansk... From that time onwards demands for reinforcement followed each other without intermission, and our commitments steadily grew without our being able to resist them..."⁹³

Ironside did not start the intervention, but clearly he too exercised a great deal of clout over the indecisive government in London, which abruptly retracted its move for withdrawal when Ironside proposed his offensive in the summer of 1919, and then just as quickly changed back again. Admittedly, Ironside was a sensible commander, and for military strategy it is reasonable to listen to the men on the ground. But the lack of any overriding policy governing Britain's strategy in North Russia was a fatal error, and allowed a useless and costly campaign to continue with no strategic results in the end. As Clemenceau is supposed to have said: "War is too important a matter to be left to the generals." The North Russia campaign was done, but the White cause had not been abandoned. Though the British did not intervene directly elsewhere in Russia in the same numbers as at Archangel, they sent money, supplies, and advisors to the White forces in the south, and to Siberia, where another "general-on-the-spot" threatened to plunge Britain into an even costlier campaign against Bolshevism.⁹⁴

Part of the intervention's original objectives was to give the Czech Legion, the Czech and Slovak volunteers in the Russian Army who had rebelled against the Bolsheviks in May 1918, an escape route out of Russia. But the experienced legionnaires showed themselves to be more than capable of fighting the Reds head on. While they conquered town after town along the Volga and in Siberia, the eastern White movement organized itself. Fighting alongside troops from the socialist (but anti-Bolshevik) White government of Samara, or KOMUCH, the Czechs captured

⁹³ "Campaign in North Russia, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 420.

⁹⁴ "Campaign in North Russia, December 1, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 418.

the city of Kazan, and with it, the entire Imperial Russian gold reserve, a colossal hoard amounted to over 651 million golden rubles. The gold was shipped to Omsk, in Siberia, where another White government was organizing.⁹⁵

Unlike Samara's staunchly Socialist Revolutionary White government, conservatives dominated the Siberian Duma at Omsk due to the support of the Siberian White Army, which numbered 40,000 troops, including 10,000 ex-Tsarist officers. In fact, the conservative Omsk government loathed the Socialist-Revolutionaries, including those running the government of its ally KOMUCH, almost as much as it hated the Bolsheviks. Before long, members of Omsk's ruling council called for a dictator to take control of the White movement in Siberia and eliminate socialist influence.⁹⁶

The Czech Legion performed excellently in Eastern Russia, but months of bloody fighting had left it exhausted towards the end of 1918. Furthermore, the Czech legionnaires disliked the reactionary Omsk government. When winter slowed down the operations in Archangel, Britain needed to find another way of intervening in Russia. The Omsk government, with its growing army, seemed a likely ally. Although Lloyd George strongly disliked the reactionary politics of the Omsk government, Balfour was more pragmatic: "The intervening force must necessarily work with those who are prepared to work with it."⁹⁷ As the British regarded the possibility of working with Omsk, their policy in Siberia came increasingly to revolve around two men: General Sir Alfred Knox, and Admiral Alexander Kolchak.

Major-General Alfred William Fortescue Knox had been the British Military Attaché to Russia throughout the war years, and the leading champion of intervention after the October

⁹⁵ Jonathon D. Smele, "White Gold: The Imperial Russian Gold Reserve in the Anti-Bolshevik East, 1918 - ?", *Europe-Asia Studies* 46 (1994): 1319.

⁹⁶ Ullman, *Intervention and the War*, 274.

⁹⁷ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, 1918, 1907.

Revolution. In 1918, the government dispatched him to Siberia at the head of the British Military Mission, or "Britmis" for short. Knox was the very model of a British general, an autocratic Ulsterman who detested the Bolsheviks, with a reputation for being "even more White than the Whites." On the way to Siberia, Knox passed through Japan, where he met and befriended an ex-Tsarist naval officer named Alexander Kolchak.⁹⁸

Forty-five years old in 1918, Admiral Alexander Vasilevich Kolchak had distinguished himself during the world war as a commander of the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet, as well as an oceanographer and a polar explorer before the war. In the autumn of 1917, Kolchak had been touring the United States as an advisor to the American Navy on the use of mines in naval warfare. Like most Tsarist officers, he considered himself staunchly apolitical, but with a patriotic duty to continue fighting Germany alongside the Allies. He left the United States to return to Russia immediately after the revolution. He arrived first in Japan in November 1917, where he met with the British ambassador and offered to serve in the British Army as a private soldier (since he feared that his high rank would make it embarrassing to serve in the Royal Navy). The British accepted his offer and prepared to send him to fight in Mesopotamia, until the Russian Minister in Peking pointed out to London that he might prove more useful to Britain by helping the White Army in Siberia. Knox met with Kolchak soon afterwards to discuss the possibility of sending him to Russia.⁹⁹

The Allies hoped to find Russians willing to embrace democratic values to work alongside, but Knox's vision of intervention did not require democratic government. The Siberian White regime in Omsk was clamoring for a strong leader to save them from Bolshevik aggression, and in Kolchak, Knox believed he had found that leader, declaring that "there is no

⁹⁸ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 74

⁹⁹ Ullman, *Intervention and the War*, 272; Varneck, Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*, 9.

doubt he is the best Russian for our purposes in the Far East." ¹⁰⁰ Kolchak landed back on Russian soil, in Vladivostok, that September. He intended to make his way to his family in the south, but passing through Omsk, the Siberian government convinced him to stay and become Minister of War. ¹⁰¹

Kolchak had no delusions about the politics of civil war, nor any hesitance about advocating an authoritarian government from his new position. "This government must lean on an armed force at its disposal..." he stated, "...without it government will be a fiction and anyone else who has an armed force at his disposal can take power into his hands." ¹⁰² Here, Knox felt certain, was the strongman that the White movement needed. Balfour sent a telegram of "general considerations" on the matter, outlining that he felt uncomfortable as always meddling in Russian affairs, but that a provisional military government like Knox proposed seemed acceptable as long as it was "presided over by a Russian who has won his position by his own personality." Ever a pragmatist, Balfour was willing to bend on the matter. ¹⁰³

In the fall of 1918, the two Siberian White governments, the SRs of KOMUCH in Samara, and the conservative government in Omsk, merged into the All-Russian Provisional Government, seated at Omsk. Tensions immediately ran high between socialists, conservatives, and military officers. Knox arrived soon after, to oversee training of officers for the Siberian White Army. French General Maurice Janin also reappeared in Russia at Vladivostok as commander of the Czech Legion and Allied military forces in Siberia, but, given the Czechs' reluctance for further fighting and the lack of British and French fighting men in Siberia, Knox

¹⁰⁰ Varneck, Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*, 75.

¹⁰¹ Ullman, *Intervention and the War*, 271.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ullman, *Intervention and the War*, 273.

in Omsk always had much greater influence over Allied policy.¹⁰⁴ Britain had little time to deal with the All-Russian Provisional Government, however. Lockhart recommended that it be supported, and in a War Cabinet meeting on the 14th of November, the Prime Minister, Curzon, Churchill, and others came to an agreement to recognize it as the legitimate government of Russia. On November 17, they drafted a note granting it official recognition.¹⁰⁵ But on the very next day, it was toppled in a coup d'état when a drunken group of Cossack officers kidnapped a number of SR politicians in Omsk, leading to an emergency session of government where it was declared that Kolchak was to be enthroned as "Supreme Ruler of Russia". Kolchak accepted the position, ending democratic participation in the Omsk government, and Knox had his dictator.¹⁰⁶

The Czech Legion promptly decried Kolchak's coup, protesting that they had not fought to establish a dictatorship. The lone British regiment in Omsk, the 25th Middlesex Battalion led by Colonel John Ward, prevented them from reversing the coup when Ward posted machine guns in the town's intersections. The Czechs backed down and no one else stepped up to challenge Kolchak. Did Knox order Ward to protect the coup plotters and place his friend Kolchak in power? Ward claimed later not to have known about the coup until after the fact, but in his post-war memoirs, he does not mention how he managed to act so fast that night, and hints that "It is certain that Admiral Koltchak [*sic*] would never have gone to Siberia, nor would have become the head of the constitutional movement and government of Russia, if he had not been advised and ever urged to do so by the Allies."¹⁰⁷ Janin, the French commander in Siberia, alleged in his memoirs that Knox was behind the affair: "L'opération semble avoir été préparée à l'avance... Le coup d'Etat a été certainement réalisé avec l'appui des représentants militaires

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 274.

¹⁰⁵ Bradley, *Allied Intervention*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 104.

¹⁰⁷ John Ward, *With the 'Die-Hards' in Siberia* (London: Cassell, 1920), x.

anglaises."¹⁰⁸ It is more likely that, as with Poole during Chaplin's coup at Archangel, Knox gave tacit consent to the coup plotters. Either way, Knox capitalized on the fact, and entirely subverted British government policymakers by supporting the toppling of the All-Russian Provisional Government one day after London had decided to recognize it.

Despite his prestigious war service, Kolchak was an unlikely candidate for a government head, much less the supreme leader of the White Army. Knox correctly insisted that he was single-minded and detested corruption, which stood him out from many other officers at Omsk, who appeared more interested in status and pay than the war effort. But he was also reserved, politically naive, and easily dominated, and Knox may very well have been behind his enthronement. Knox mingled easily with Russian officers, and everyone in Omsk knew his opinions on Kolchak. The 25th Middlesex had a key role in the coup's success. Whether they had planned it (as Janin angrily believed) or not, Knox and British soldiers had made Kolchak's coup achievable. Knox and Britmis benefited immediately, being given a comfy new house to stay in instead of the cramped railway cars in which many others dwelled in the crowded town.¹⁰⁹ His duty in Omsk was to retrain the Russian army for combat. With his friend Kolchak in complete control, this became substantially easier. More importantly, Kolchak put Knox in charge of the Siberian Army's rear echelons, meaning that the British general controlled the supply lines to Omsk, giving him an immense deal of power. Knox's dreamed-of Siberian anti-Bolshevik crusade could begin, and his role was easily visible: Kolchak and his soldiers wore British uniforms, and *God Save the King* followed the Russian anthem at state functions.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Maurice Janin, *Ma mission en Sibérie, 1918-1920* (Paris: Payot, 1938), 31. "The operation seems to have been prepared in advance... The coup d'état was certainly realized with the support of English military representatives."

¹⁰⁹ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 119.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 120.

Kolchak's coup happened one week after the end of World War I. As in North Russia, the end of the war meant that the original aim of the intervention, beating the Germans, had been completed. The Czech Legion largely withdrew from combat at this point, disillusioned with Omsk's reactionary politics and now hoping to return to Czechoslovakia, newly liberated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire by the Allied victory. For the rest of the Russian Civil War in Siberia the Czechs played a much smaller role, guarding railways from partisan attacks instead of fighting at the front lines.¹¹¹ At the Paris Peace Conference, Allied statesmen discussed the coup and Kolchak's status as de-facto leader of the White movement. As a committed liberal, Lloyd George had his doubts about the new White regime, especially when Kolchak's government made no immediate impression in the war against the Reds. The British Prime Minister suspected that the Russian people preferred the Bolsheviks to the Whites, and in any case felt that the idea of a victorious reactionary government ruling post-war Russia was no more attractive than a Bolshevik victory. He requested that the Imperial War Cabinet draw up a list of options for the situation in Russia, including the possibilities of withdrawal, intervention, limited aid to the Whites, or the idea of setting up a *cordon sanitaire* to prevent the spread of Bolshevism into the rest of Europe. The result of this was the proposal for the Reds and Whites to meet at Prinkipo, which Kolchak and the other White leaders angrily rejected.¹¹²

Since Prinkipo failed, the intervention remained a military operation. Knox had a like mind in the War Cabinet in the young Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill. Churchill hated the Bolsheviks as much as Knox did, going as far as proposing that Germany be allowed to raise an eastern army to help confront them. Knox also had friends in the Foreign Office, as both Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon and Under-Secretary Lord Cecil supported the intervention,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 198.

¹¹² War Cabinet Minutes WC 531 B, 6. page 137

rejecting a motion from the French to remove Knox from his command.¹¹³ Lloyd George pointed out that to help the Whites would require a massive amount of money and support, as well as volunteers, who would not be forthcoming. Churchill agreed that the situation looked difficult, but preferred a massive commitment to withdrawal. Churchill dearly wanted to send more aid to White Siberia, while Lloyd George leaned towards not supporting the Kolchak regime.¹¹⁴ It is tempting, then, to view the British intervention in Russia as a struggle between Churchill and Lloyd George. However, the Secretary of State for War, however energetic, did not have much support in the Cabinet, which the Prime Minister dominated. As early as November 14th, 1918, the War Cabinet decided against a large-scale military intervention, maintaining that "a military crusade against Bolshevism was impossible and it would involve us in military operations of unknown magnitude." The government in London, with the exception of Churchill and some Conservative political greenhorns elected in 1918, never supported intervention warmly. Even Churchill and Curzon, the two most important supporters of the intervention in the British government, never agreed on how or where British power should be used to help the Whites. The possibility of Britain sending more aid to the Whites depended on the "generals-on-the-spot".¹¹⁵

If Lloyd George steadily grew more personally opposed to the intervention, Knox nevertheless continued to have free reign over policy in Siberia, and advocated support for Kolchak.¹¹⁶ The admiral's position seemed weak immediately after his coup, but he and his generals spent the winter in Omsk planning, and in March 1919 the Siberian military launched a crushing attack with three armies that threw back the Reds and made astonishing headway. In

¹¹³ War Cabinet Minutes W.C. 493, 30 October 1918, Noon, 3. Page 111

¹¹⁴ War Cabinet Minutes WC 531 B, 12 February 1919, 11:30 AM, 136.

¹¹⁵ War Cabinet Minutes WC 502, 14 November 1918, Noon, 4. page 158, G.H. Bennett, *Foreign Policy During the Curzon Period, 1919-1924* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 60.

¹¹⁶ Millman, "The Problem with Generals," 317.

April the Siberian White Army reached the banks of the Volga River to the west. Although flush with victory, constant fighting and marching over huge distances had taken their toll on the Siberian Army, and the White troops badly needed rest and reinforcements. They got neither. For one thing, Kolchak had almost no reserves. Everything had been thrown into the frontlines to march on to Moscow. Yet a sense of unrealistic optimism reigned in Omsk, where one general proclaimed that any further Red resistance would be nothing more than the death spasms of a failing army. White officers, overcome with confidence, executed entire units of captured Bolshevik soldiers and deserters, rather than incorporating them into their army to make up for casualties, as the Red Army did. The situation looked deceptively good to observers in Omsk and London, but in reality Kolchak's armies would face defeat as soon as the Reds reorganized.¹¹⁷

Now that Kolchak's position looked favorable, the Allied Supreme Council in Paris sent him a note hinting at possible recognition. If the Allies recognized Omsk as the legitimate Russian government, it could expect far more support from them, perhaps even from the United States, and a huge psychological boost to its position in Russia. The note had been sent at the precise apex of the admiral's position, arriving just before his armies started to crumble apart in the face of a Red counter-offensive that briskly reconquered ground and approached ominously close to Omsk.¹¹⁸ The British administrators in Russia continued to follow Knox's lead though, and in April 1919, the British High Commissioner in Vladivostok, Sir Charles Elliot, wrote to Curzon, proposing that Kolchak's regime be recognized.¹¹⁹ Curzon, acting Foreign Secretary while Balfour was in Paris, wrote Balfour to pass the idea on to the Prime Minister. Curzon

¹¹⁷ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 309.

¹¹⁸ Richard Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, Volume II: Britain and the Russian Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 205.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

recognized that Kolchak had faced some setbacks, but he believed that recognition could help alleviate pressure on the admiral's position. Kolchak, he believed, still had an effective army and an efficient state apparatus (though neither of those would seem at all evident to an observer in Siberia as the Reds drew closer). The Foreign Secretary recommended that recognition should be used to entice Kolchak into enacting liberal reforms and promising to restore democracy in Russia. "If Admiral Kolchak's Government is ever to be recognized, the moment for doing so would appear to have arrived," concluded Curzon, but it was already too late.¹²⁰

Churchill took up the idea as well, and mentioned it to the leader of the Conservative Party in Parliament, Andrew Bonar Law, who was departing for Paris to see the British peace delegation in April. Kolchak had written to the British that he expected to be near Moscow by June, and a general sense of optimism swept over the War Cabinet. Lloyd George passed on the idea in council with Clemenceau, Wilson, and Orlando at the peace talks in Paris, and he agreed with Curzon's notion of imposing several conditions on the admiral, including a promise for fair and democratic government.¹²¹ Lloyd George felt hopeful that these ideas could be enforced on Kolchak. He was not being entirely altruistic: a restored Russia under Kolchak would need hefty British support to revitalize itself and be an excellent market for British trade, and could be compelled to pay off the cancelled Imperial debts that Russia owed to Britain and France.¹²²

London had first supported the Whites somewhat grudgingly, but the War Cabinet and the Prime Minister's sudden swing to support of official recognition shows that the optimism of Knox's constant telegrams to the War Office had finally worn off. The original plan for intervention had relied almost entirely on the Japanese and Czechs. Knox, the man-on-the-spot, had swung the focus of the Britain's intervention in Russia to supporting Kolchak. Now Knox

¹²⁰"Earl Curzon to Mr. Balfour, April 15, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 81.

¹²¹ War Cabinet Minutes, W.C. 560, 29 April 1919, 140.

¹²² Ullman, *Britain and the Russian Civil War*, 164.

had finally swayed the government in London to see things his way. The British government supported Knox and Kolchak by sending shipments of uniforms, weapons, and ammunition to the Siberian White forces. In return, they expected certain concessions from the admiral, which Balfour telegraphed Kolchak in July as a list of conditions for continued support. These included a promise to restore an elected Constituent Assembly in Moscow, free elections throughout Russia, the recognition of former Russian subject nations' borders, and the repayment of Imperial Russian debts to Britain and France.¹²³ The admiral replied on June 4, in a letter which Knox helped pen, promising that he did not intend to stay in power after he had defeated the Bolsheviks. He coolly remarked that the issue of sovereignty in former Imperial Russian domains, like Finland, would be up to a reconstituted Russian government, but other than that he acceded to the Allied demands.¹²⁴

The sudden shift in British opinion towards Kolchak is clearly evident by examining a memorandum published the same day as Curzon's letter to Balfour in support of recognition. This other memo documents the opinion of the British delegation in Paris, including that of Balfour and the Prime Minister, towards Allied intervention. The delegation agreed that the lack of a definite foreign policy towards Russia had complicated the situation of the White governments, and that a suitable policy had to be finally settled upon. Dismissing the option of a full military intervention, they decided complete withdrawal presented the best solution. It represented an abandonment of the White Russian cause, in favor of new negotiations with the Bolsheviks, who they would ask to recognize the borders of the nascent countries bordering Russia, including Poland and the Baltic states, in exchange for the end of any Allied intervention in support of the anti-Bolshevik armies. "The original Allied demand to the Bolsheviks should

¹²³"Mr. Balfour to Earl Curzon, May 25, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 201.

¹²⁴ "Admiral Koltchak's Reply to the Allies, June, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 343.

include an undertaking to withdraw such Allied troops as remain in Russia proper, and to cease to supply materials or money to all Russian anti-Bolshevik organizations..." Of course, wrote the delegates, this might be construed as betrayal of Denikin, Kolchak, and the other White leaders. "This aspect of the question will be further considered later," they laconically concluded.¹²⁵ The fact that the delegation changed their minds on the very same day to ditch this idea and support recognition for Kolchak shows a marked lack of any consistent British policy. With no clear direction from the War Cabinet or the delegation in Paris, crucial decisions like recognition hinged on Knox's opinions.

For all the confident talk in Omsk about imminent victory, the Red Army was not in the last throes of its death spasms. In spite of their headlong retreat from March until May, the Reds still possessed a huge advantage, for behind them lay Russia's heartland, the industrial and population centers that made a protracted war possible. The Red Army outnumbered and outgunned their opponents on a huge scale, while unfortunately for Kolchak's soldiers, not much of the British supplies promised them had reached the front lines. Corruption ran rampant in Kolchak's White Russia, and Siberian Army officers and administrators swiped ample amounts of British aid to sell on the black market. Most of the rest lay where it arrived, unable to be transported over mismanaged Siberian railroads.¹²⁶ The qualitative and quantitative advantages of the Reds revealed themselves in May, when a Bolshevik counterattack rolled back Kolchak's forces to almost exactly where they had started months before.¹²⁷ The Siberian White Army broke down entirely, many units defecting to the Reds or deserting to return to their own homes.

¹²⁵"Memorandum by the British Delegation in Paris on a Suggested Policy for Russia, April 15, 1919," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 82.

¹²⁶ Some of the British optimism lay in the belief that Kolchak's forces could make good use of the Trans-Siberian railroad, but this had always been a primarily eastward-bound route, not one from Siberia to Moscow, a major oversight in Omsk's planning.

Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 676; "Trans-Siberian Railway, n.d.," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 459

¹²⁷ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 317.

Soldiers refused to fight; their officers spent more time looting than looking after their troops. A Dutch observer in a military hospital noted that almost all the patients were men who had shot off their own index fingers to avoid being sent into battle. Panic took hold in Omsk as the situation grew more desperate. Two of Kolchak's generals declared, in a manner that seemed more farcical than inspired, that they would save the day by rallying thousands of religious volunteers to crusade against the "Bolshevik antichrist", and Kolchak himself even had the local Muslim mullahs call for jihad against Moscow. Some of Kolchak's abler ministers tried to reform the government, but even these sounder measures were far too late to save the White regime in Siberia.¹²⁸

As always, British policy depended on Knox. In June 1919, when the Bolshevik counter-offensive had driven Kolchak's armies into panicked retreat, London continued to view the Siberian situation optimistically, and extended shipments of supplies to the Omsk government.¹²⁹ Even as late as the autumn of that year, while the Reds advanced closer and closer, Britmis reported untruthfully that Kolchak's armies were "conducting an offensive with marked success and the situation on their fronts is very satisfactory."¹³⁰ Lloyd George felt pleased with Kolchak's progress after this evaluation by Knox of the situation in Siberia, which he reported to Wilson, Clemenceau, and Orlando, in Paris.¹³¹ Eventually, though, even Knox realized the desperate situation facing the Whites. For all his notions that Bolshevik defeat was a certainty, Knox could not avoid coming to the conclusion that Kolchak had lost. Further supplying Omsk would be a waste: most of the British war material had not reached the front, and that which did usually fell

¹²⁸ Ibid., 480; 495; 539.

¹³⁰"Appreciation of the Situation on the Siberian Front, with special reference to the possibilities of an advance of Kotlas during the summer and autumn of 1919, n.d.," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 460.

¹³¹ "Extract from notes of a meeting held at President Wilson's House in the Place des Etat-Unis, Paris, June 3, 1919," *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 342.

into the hands of the Reds. One smug Bolshevik officer actually sent Knox a telegram thanking him for "equipping" the Red Army.¹³²

Knox reported to his superiors in London that to send any more supplies "would be like pouring money down a drain." Elliot, now in Omsk alongside Knox, dispatched a telegram to Curzon in July describing the dismal mood in the capital, preparing for evacuation as Red troops approached the outskirts.¹³³ Knox's abandonment of Kolchak's cause represented the ultimate death blow to the Siberian White regime, which depended utterly on British supplies. It seems very likely that Knox's decision to end support stemmed from a loss of personal influence with Kolchak. Knox originally held immense influence with the admiral, especially since Kolchak depended so heavily on Britain. As his armies crumbled around him, Kolchak rebelled against Knox's advice to withdraw and instead advocated for a counterattack. Dejected and frustrated with Kolchak's increasingly unrealistic scheme, Knox decided to end his support. He wrote to London, bitterly complaining that Kolchak's chief-of-staff, Lebedev, now had more influence over Kolchak than anyone else, and griped further that he felt the admiral was losing his grip on the situation, dependant now on officers "likely to mislead him". In truth, Knox was incredibly frustrated that he no longer held Kolchak's ear. No more the guiding advisor to Kolchak, Knox ended his support for the admiral, revealing in astonishing clarity his very self-centered view of the war in Siberia.¹³⁴

Omsk, capital of White Siberia, fell to the Bolsheviks with little resistance on November 14th, 1919, just under a year since Admiral Kolchak's coup d'état. The admiral had fled the day before on an eastward-bound train, intending to keep up the struggle from Vladivostok.

¹³² Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 480.

¹³³ "Appreciation of the Situation on the Siberian Front, n.d.," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 461.

¹³⁴ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 485; "Mr. O'Reilly (Vladivostok) to Earl Curzon, August 16, 1919," *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 498.

However, during his reign, Kolchak had alienated practically all his supporters with inefficient, brutal, and authoritarian government, turning all but the most fervent reactionaries against him. Thousands of anti-Kolchak partisans rose up in the Siberian hinterlands to shake off his rule. Even former allies, like the SRs, found the Bolsheviks preferable by this point, and the Czech Legion, which had never had much love for Kolchak, refused to help him when Omsk needed their aid the most.¹³⁵

The amount of people fleeing east along the railroad frustrated Kolchak's escape. Traffic jams held up the admiral and his entourage constantly as they shuffled east on the Trans-Siberian Railway, delayed further by partisan attacks and wracked the whole time by typhus which spread like wildfire throughout the train-cars crowded with refugees. The Czech Legion still controlled the railways, but the increasingly anarchic situation stretched its capabilities to the limit, and Czech soldiers concentrated foremost on ensuring their own escape from the vengeful Reds. While Kolchak fled, the last White armies in Siberia deserted or surrendered and Siberian cities placed SRs in power to try and placate the Bolshevik victors.¹³⁶

As Kolchak waited to move through the city of Irkutsk, 1,500 miles from Vladivostok, his situation descended into essential imprisonment. The Czechs controlled his access to the outside world, and posted sentries around his seven governmental trains, which included the Imperial Russian gold reserve. Irkutsk's new socialist government declared the admiral an enemy of the people. General Janin, the Czech Legion's French commander, issued a directive to protect Kolchak, but in private he sent a telegram to Paris confirming that this was easier said than done.¹³⁷ The British made no attempt to save Kolchak, their proxy in Russia, either. In a letter to the American Embassy, one British diplomat supposed that there was no longer anything

¹³⁵ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 568.

¹³⁶ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 603;604.

¹³⁷ Fleming, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*, 188.

to gain by supporting him. Without Knox's guidance, British policy turned ruthlessly pragmatic and abandoned the admiral to his fate.¹³⁸

The Czechs demanded that Kolchak step down as Supreme Ruler, but agreed to allow him to leave, by himself, under Allied protection. To his credit, Kolchak refused to desert his last supporters. He did resign as Supreme Ruler, though, and in a final show of inability to judge character, passed the title on to Grigory Semyonov, a gangster in Japanese pay and perhaps the least deserving candidate possible.¹³⁹ When angry mobs in Irkutsk called to the Czech guards around the trains to hand Kolchak over, Janin ordered them to do so, and the ex-Supreme Ruler of the All-Russian Government was imprisoned in a tiny jail cell. The Red Army arrived in Irkutsk on January 21, and interrogated Kolchak exhaustively, throughout which the usually reticent admiral displayed considerable poise. In early February a desperate attack by one of the remaining White generals in Siberia cut short the interrogation, when it looked briefly that the prisoners might be rescued. Fearing his escape, Kolchak's captors led him and his Prime Minister to the prison courtyard on February 7th, just before dawn. The admiral asked an officer, "Would you be so good as to get a message sent to my wife in Paris, to say that I bless my son?" "I'll see what can be done, if I don't forget about it," came the reply. Kolchak refused a blindfold. A ragged volley killed the condemned, and their bodies were thrown under the ice of a nearby river. The Bolshevik officer who presided over Admiral Kolchak's execution wrote, curiously, that Kolchak had faced death with dignity - "like an Englishman."¹⁴⁰

In the end, British policy towards Kolchak always revolved around Knox. The general had placed Kolchak on his throne in Omsk, but he abandoned his friend when Kolchak's fortunes

¹³⁸ "Note by Mr. Gregory of a conversation with Mr. Butler, December 5, 1919," *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 687.

¹³⁹ Fleming, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*, 191.

¹⁴⁰ Fleming, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*, 217.

took a turn for the worse. In the last report of Britmis, summing up the Siberian affair, Knox announced that history would lay the blame for White failure in Siberia on Kolchak. He is probably correct. In this final memo, Knox pointed out that Kolchak had not been entirely fit to be a dictator. Though he was "undoubtedly honest and intensely patriotic," he had also been unwilling to appear in public, and the governance of his state fell to the hands of officers with much less dignity than Kolchak himself possessed. He had neglected administration to go closer to the front, where he felt more comfortable, but while personally brave he had little expertise in the tactics of land warfare. Siberia, furthermore, is not cut out to act as the base of a warlord, especially when the Bolsheviks dominated Russia's heartland. Kolchak depended fully on British supplies and money, which he could not even use when he received them due to the poor governance of his realm, an iron-fisted administration run by corrupt lackeys, tyrannical generals, and young soldiers who had only ever known war and terrorized the Siberian populace to the point where large armies of partisans had risen up to defend themselves from Kolchak's forces.¹⁴¹

Knox points out, fairly, that Kolchak would have had to have been a Napoleon to have won in his dismal situation. But in identifying Kolchak's faults, he addresses his own. After all, it had been Knox who had helped make Kolchak Siberian dictator as a way of leading his own anti-Bolshevik crusade. Millman writes that Knox had less an influence on the war than other British commanders, because he headed an advising mission rather than a large detachment of troops, like Poole did in Archangel. But this is to ignore the tremendous amount of supplies given by Britain to Kolchak at Knox's bequest, enabling the White Siberian Army to challenge the Reds on a massive scale in 1919. If the tide had not turned against the Reds, who knows

¹⁴¹ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 668.

what policy Knox might have suggested. Had the war in Siberia gone in the White's favor, Knox might have ended up leading the most spectacular intervention campaign of all.

Ultimately though, Knox cannot be blamed entirely for leading a failing British intervention in Siberia. The British government went along with Knox's program, often against its better judgment and despite signs that Kolchak's government was reactionary and not as strong as it looked. Lockhart, in his memorandum about the interior situation in Russia in 1918, had foreseen the strength of the Bolshevik government, but his views had been overlooked in favor of Knox, who told the government in London what it wanted to hear. British policy in Siberia therefore revolved almost entirely around the preconceived notions and prejudices of Knox, who blindly ignored the faults of Kolchak's government and the strengths of the Bolshevik regime in Moscow so that he could wage a private war against the revolutionaries. When he lost his position of preeminent influence over the admirals, Knox gave up his crusade, and London followed Knox's lead in ending their support for Kolchak.

One feature of the Allied intervention in Siberia was the jealous rivalry between the French and British military missions. Colonel Ward, the commander of the 25th Middlesex stationed in Omsk, blamed the French for trying to ruin Knox's plans: "General Knox had hardly begun to perform this duty [reorganizing the Russian Army] when the French agents in Siberia became alarmed for their own position. Cables were dispatched to Europe pointing out the danger to French prestige which General Knox's mission entailed... better to leave Russia without an army than have it organized under [English] influence."¹⁴² Ward gives Janin, Knox's French counterpart, too much credit (French officers in Siberia, likewise, sniped at Knox in their memoirs). In the end, probably the most important decision made by the French general was to hand Kolchak over to the Reds.

¹⁴² Ward, *With the 'Die-Hards' in Siberia*, 141.

Other French officers, like Janin, were unable to affect French foreign policy to the extent of their British counterparts. Yet although French military mission had a negligible impact in Siberia, paradoxically, the French were the most committed Western anti-Communists during the Russian Civil War. Prime Minister Clemenceau was a particularly outspoken red-baiter, who accused Lloyd George of cowardice when he ended British support to Kolchak. Despite their anti-Bolshevik credentials, however, the French provided much fewer supplies and took a less active role in the Russian Civil War than the British. The British, for example, provided Kolchak's forces with 200,000 uniforms, 600,000 rifles, 6,831 machine guns, and 97,000 tons of other supplies between October 1918 and October 1918. The French, in contrast, sent only a few hundred machine guns to Kolchak during this period, and these had originally intended for the Czech Legion. To other White generals, like Denikin, the French provided similarly little.¹⁴³

Why was France's participation in the Russian Civil War more limited? Where Britain did not have troops on the ground, it fought through proxy by supporting the White armies, but France did not. Unlike Britain, France had no "generals-on-the-spot" who dragged it deeper into the Russian entanglement. The origins and course of France's one large, brief, failed foray into the Russian Civil War help explain why not. Not only was France's military and economy weakened by the devastating war on its own territory, limiting the material ability of French generals to "go rogue", the plans for the French intervention in Russia originated in the French foreign office, the Quai d'Orsay, not the military as in Britain.

The Bolshevik Revolution originally concerned the French more than the British. Before the war, France provided the great bulk of capital for Russia. Most of the loans came not from banks, but from *petits rentiers* looking to invest their savings. Therefore, when the Bolsheviks cancelled Imperial Russia's debts, they left an entire generation of French men and women

¹⁴³ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 79.

devastated (even today, many French families are eager to tell stories of how their family was ruined by Russia repudiating its debts). The French government originally tried to deny that the Bolsheviks refused to honor Russian debts, and when the truth came out, it temporarily paid Russian coupons, but France had could hardly set the dangerous precedent of paying off another power's loans when it defaulted.¹⁴⁴ Investors, mobilized into lobby groups, agitated for action. The French government, even more than its ally Britain, also feared that Germany would regain the upper hand in the war by making use of Russia's vast resources. Furthermore, even if Germany still lost the war, Russia had been France's chief pre-war ally, and Paris wanted to restore the old balance of power to be safe from Germany aggression in the future. A military mission to Russia could help the Whites end the Bolshevik revolution and restore a Russian government that honored its debts and its alliance to France. The French ambassador to Russia, Joseph Noulens, promised his nation that "France and her allies will not leave Russia to the Bolsheviks."¹⁴⁵

Some French troops fought under Poole's command at Archangel, but besides that small contingent, the French followed a different path to intervention in Russia than the British. In the French case, the army did not decide on intervention without the authorization of the government, but instead it happened the other way around. During the First World War, a French expeditionary Force, l'Armée d'Orient, fought in the Balkans and in Romania. After the victory, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau wanted to extend the French Army's mission eastwards into southern Russia and Ukraine, where they could occupy Russian industry to help recover money owed to France, and help shore up the flank of the Volunteer Army, a group of Whites fighting in South Russia under the command of General Anton Denikin. However, the

¹⁴⁴ Siegel, *For Peace and Money*, 170-171.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 176; Bradley, *Allied Intervention*, 133.

commander of the Armée d'Orient, General Franchet d'Espéry, opposed the plan when Clemenceau consulted him towards the end of the war.¹⁴⁶

The French government was in less of a position than the British to be bullied by its army. Although the French Third Republic was unstable by nature, in 1918 it had an unusually strong executive in the person of Clemenceau, a veteran political animal nicknamed "*Le Tigre*". Lloyd George, on the other hand, depended on an uneasy wartime coalition between the Liberals and the Conservatives. Clemenceau could also depend on the cooperation of the (usually less-amenable) foreign office, the Quai d'Orsay, because it was headed by an old friend, Stephen Pinchon, whereas Lloyd George did not get along well with his Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, and tended to go over his head. Though Curzon detested the Bolsheviks, (a former Viceroy of India, he viewed the Russian Civil War in Central Asia as another round of the "Great Game" between Britain and Russia for control of India), he failed to exert much authority in the British Cabinet, partially because he disliked "grand designs" of foreign policy, which led him to vacillate between trying to broker peace in Russia and supporting the Whites. As Lloyd George grew more hostile to the intervention, Curzon deferred to the Prime Minister on most questions of foreign policy, and since Lloyd George had few firm stances on Russia, the British Army officers in Russia filled the void themselves.¹⁴⁷

Although British politicians tended to view service in the Foreign Office as a stepping stone on the political ladder, the diplomats of the Quai d'Orsay were dedicated ambassadors and bureaucrats. A civil service test, the *concours*, had been implemented before the war, but most of the French foreign service remained composed of the upper-bourgeois, especially in the powerful commercial section, which championed French fiscal interests abroad. With the French

¹⁴⁶ Bradley, *Allied Intervention*, 137.

¹⁴⁷ Watson, "Britain, France, and the Russian Civil War," 90.

business sector lobbying strenuously for something to be done about the defaulted debts, the Quai d'Orsay had a powerful economic motive to intervene in Russia.¹⁴⁸ Economic motivations drove France's intervention, rather than an army that wanted to fight Germans in Russia and settled for fighting the Red Army instead, as in Britain's case. Regardless of d'Espèry's objections, the government arranged a mixed taskforce of French, Greek, and Romanian troops to land in Ukraine, headed by French General Henri Berthelot.¹⁴⁹ The French diplomats imagined that the period of Bolshevik rule in Russia would be a short aberration, and that Berthelot's occupying forces would simply accelerate the process of its inevitable defeat, asserting French influence and business interests while hopefully leaving the fighting to Denikin's Volunteers. Like the British plans for Russia, the French idea carried traces of colonialism. Michael Jabara Carley wrote that France's predatory attempt to partition a war-torn area of Russia “remained essentially that of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the great imperialist powers swallowed up most of Africa and Southeast Asia and jostled one another to prey upon the declining empires of Turkey and China”.¹⁵⁰

Although the French had different motives for intervening in Russia, they planned no better than the British. The French intervention in Russia was an unmitigated disaster from the beginning. The original plan was for the French to act as auxiliaries for the Whites, guarding their rear echelon and providing some assistance, but letting Russian soldiers do the bulk of the fighting. However, the French Foreign Office confused the matter by issuing the vaguest directions possible to Berthelot, telling him to "support all patriotic Russians", and giving him a promise for twelve divisions of quality troops. To whom "patriotic Russians" referred was left

¹⁴⁸ M.B. Hayne, *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War, 1898-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), 24.

¹⁴⁹ Bradley, *Allied Intervention*, 137.

¹⁵⁰ Carley, *Revolution and Intervention*, 245.

up for interpretation. This became especially confusing in Ukraine, where the French forces planned to land, because it was divided in late 1918 between a number of fighting factions, including the White forces of the Volunteer Army, the Red Army, a right-wing government in Kiev propped up by the Germans, and a nationalist Ukrainian army led by Symon Petliura. Infrequent guerilla fighting between the opposing blocs ravaged the countryside. All the non-Bolshevik factions looked to the French as an ally and developed unreasonable expectations of French support; before the landing, Berthelot met with a representative from the Volunteer Army in Bucharest, who requested the French supply eighteen divisions of troops and material to the Whites to arm and equip half a million soldiers. That was wishful thinking: France's war-weary government could not even make good on its promises to Berthelot. A French flotilla arrived at Odessa, in modern western Ukraine, on December 18, 1917, carrying only three under-strength divisions of the promised twelve, some 3,000 troops in total, and most of them less well-trained Greek soldiers instead of veteran Frenchmen. One of the three divisions could not even be deployed because of an influenza epidemic in the ranks. Berthelot immediately protested to the government that he could be expected to occupy a wide area of Ukraine with barely three battalions of second-class troops.¹⁵¹

Political troubles followed for Berthelot, who interpreted his orders to help "all patriotic Russians" to mean helping anyone who fought the Bolsheviks, not just the White Volunteer Army. The French general tried to work with both the Volunteers and the Petliura's Ukrainian nationalists, but this proved impossible. The Volunteers insisted on "one Russia, indivisible", and fought against the independence-seeking Ukrainian nationalists as well as the Reds. By trying to work with all the factions in Ukraine, the French managed to alienate them instead,

¹⁵¹ J. Kim Munholland, "The French Army and Intervention in Southern Russia..1918-1919," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 22 (1981): 45.

pleasing no one and irritating them all. The French arrived in Odessa in December greeted by a band playing *la Marseillaise* and a crowd cheering for their wartime ally.¹⁵² But tensions cooled almost overnight. The French and Volunteer troops in Odessa cohabitated with men from Petliura's Ukrainian army under a tenuous truce, which terminated every so often when the streets would explode into firing after one side or the other took a potshot at someone else. Even the Volunteers and the French got along poorly. Officers argued over who controlled the government of the city, while the Volunteer rank-and-file accused the French of breaking their promises to send more men and supplies, to which the French responded by accusing the Volunteers of preferring to lounge outside Odessa's cafes to fighting the Bolsheviks on the front lines.¹⁵³ The civilians, initially supportive, grew more hostile over time as well. A French newspaperman living in Paris noted how at first the city's elite eagerly conversed with French officers, but began to feel humiliated as the occupation continued. He also remarked that the French, on the other hand, distrusted their Volunteer allies, who engaged in widespread corruption in the city administration: "Finalement, l'administration, désorganisée, vénale, tour à tour corrompue... renonça définitivement à toute apparence de scrupules et n'eut qu'un seul souci : extorquer à la population tout ce qu'elle pouvait encore lui extorquer, afin de se pourvoir de son mieux contre la menace d'un avenir incertain et gros de dangers."¹⁵⁴

Internal unrest continued to occur within the ranks of the French expeditionary force as well. Both illness and ill-discipline wracked Berthelot's meager force. Officers repeatedly found their men reading communist pamphlets, and the soldiers threatened to mutiny if ordered to fight, because, as one officer explained, "No French soldier who saved his life after the Marne or

¹⁵² Jean Xydias, *L'Intervention française en Russie, 1918-1919, Souvenirs d'un témoin* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1927), 177

¹⁵³ Munholland, "The French Army and Intervention," 48.

¹⁵⁴ Xydias, *L'Intervention française*, 241.

Verdun would want to lose it on the fields of Russia."¹⁵⁵ Berthelot grew increasingly convinced that he could not achieve victory with the forces he had been given. His fears showed themselves to be correct when a column of Bolshevik partisans descended upon the French zone of occupation in March 1919, commanded by guerrilla leader Nikofo Grigoriev, a flamboyant Cossack with a penchant for switching sides whenever it suited him. Grigoriev's partisans, who Berthelot estimated to be ten-times more numerous than his own forces, stormed French and Greek positions in the villages of Kherson and Nikolaev in mid-March, before marching on Odessa itself. D'Esperey and other French military leaders unanimously called for evacuation as Berthelot's forces withdrew to a defensive ring around the city.¹⁵⁶ Despite promising the inhabitants of Odessa and the Volunteer troops that they would defend the city, the French evacuated on April 6. Three weeks later, the fall of a French-supported White government in the Crimea ended France's direct participation in the Russian Civil War.¹⁵⁷

Part of the reason that France did not have any "generals-on-the-spot" meddling in foreign policy is simply because their general in South Russia, Berthelot, did not have enough quality troops to occupy his objectives, let alone to act recklessly like his British peers. With a large area of its industry and manpower devastated by long years of warfare on the Western Front, France could not afford the same expenditures in Russia as the British could, limiting the opportunity for its generals to make policy independently. Poole could call on more reinforcements for the north Russian front, and Knox more rifles and ammo for Kolchak's army, but the French could not even give Berthelot the forces he need for his original objectives, let alone additional ones. Even though the French hated the Bolsheviks as much as the British did,

¹⁵⁵ Munholland, "The French Army and Intervention," 50.

¹⁵⁶ Munholland, "The French Army and Intervention," 54.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 60; "The Commission to Negotiate Peace to the Acting Secretary of State," April 11, 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*. 757.

and perhaps more so, they wielded less influence with the White Army. The British could dictate orders to the Provisional Government in Archangel, and to Kolchak as well, since he depended on British supplies. In Ukraine, the relationship between the French and Volunteers was markedly less cooperative, and thus the French army and the Quai d'Orsay grew disillusioned towards the prospects of a White victory and turned against further intervention in the Russian Civil War. Afterwards, the French government broke with Britain by turning away from the Whites and towards different diplomatic paths in Eastern Europe, focusing on creating a "Little Entente" by allying with Czechoslovakia and Poland to restore the power balance against Germany and create a *cordon sanitaire* to halt the spread of Bolshevism, rather than continuing to hope for a White victory. If Berthelot had had more resources with which to fight, or had gotten along better with the Whites, perhaps he might turned French policy towards alliance with the Whites, like Knox did for the British in Siberia. But chances of this were slim given France's limited manpower and resources.

. In the British case, the diplomatic service and the government in London failed to reign in the military. On the French side, however, the Quai d'Orsay and Clemenceau clearly overruled the military on foreign policy in Russia, able to decide to intervene against General d'Esperey's objections. Admittedly, the Quai d'Orsay's planning for Russia was clumsy, giving Berthelot vague orders and insufficient forces. But when the intervention failed, France withdrew from entanglements in Russia, without letting the military get further involved, demonstrating that the French government had tighter control over its military than the British, whose generals sucked it deeper into intervention. The problem of the "general-on-the-spot" was uniquely British during the Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War. Historically, this is not so surprising. Every 19th and 20th century European empire had its own "men-on-the-spot", willing to set the agenda

in faraway imperial corners, but it was a phenomenon that applied most to the British, whose concept of empire was neither particularly centralized or homogenous (the government of India, for example was more or less a sovereign state unto itself), compared to France's vision of its colonial empire as *la France d'outre-mer*.

The Bolshevik Revolution posed a mighty problem to the Allies in the closing stages of World War I. The British diplomat Bruce Lockhart tried to offer the solutions in a memo to the Foreign Office after his mission to Moscow in 1918. Britain, as Lockhart saw it, had three options: to abandon the intervention, to intervene in a limited way by supplying the White Army, or make full use of British power "to intervene immediately on a proper scale... in order to strike a blow at the very heart of Bolshevism." Lockhart warned against option two, limited intervention: "Without the active support of foreign troops the counter-revolutionary forces in Russia are not strong enough to overcome the Bolsheviks. By financing these organizations, and yet not supporting them actively, we lay ourselves open to the same charges as if we were intervening in force, and at the same time we are only prolonging civil war and unnecessary bloodshed in Russia."¹⁵⁸

The British government ignored Lockhart's assessment, and followed the course he had advised against. His warning proved correct. Allied intervention did not operate on a large enough scale to be decisive; it merely prolonged a horrendous civil war. The Whites reached their high watermark in the late-spring of 1919: Moscow surrounded on three sides by Kolchak's forces on the Volga to the East, Denikin's Volunteers surging northwards from the Don, and another White army led by General Yudenich in the Baltic on the doorstep of Petrograd (St. Petersburg) in the North. Their victories were deceptive, however, their armies disastrously

¹⁵⁸ "Mr. Lockhart to Mr. Balfour, Memorandum on the Internal Situation in Russia, November 7, 1918," *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 35.

outnumbered, and within weeks all three threats had been pushed back the Red Army. One by one, the White armies collapsed under relentless counter-attacks, until by 1921 every major anti-Bolshevik threat in Russia had been defeated, and the Russian Civil War essentially ended in a Red victory. Richard Pipes compared the situation to the American Civil War, where one side had such an advantage in manpower and industry that its eventual victory was inevitable.¹⁵⁹ The Allied intervention, especially the British role, helped the Whites greatly with supplies, money, and sometimes military support, but the intervention was ultimately half-hearted and lacking clear strategy and goals. It prolonged the Russian Civil War without giving the Whites enough support to win, leading to the unnecessary deaths of thousands more Russians, both White and Red, just as Lockhart had predicted. It also gave the Bolsheviks a major propaganda coup, letting them frame the war as an attempt by "eighteen invading armies" of the capitalist powers to destroy the workers' revolution, with the Whites as their stooges.¹⁶⁰

Because the British government failed to come up with a consistent line on the Russian problem, its generals on the ground usurped its authority by plunging forward with their own reckless policies. The end of the First World War completed the original objective of the Allied intervention in Russia, beating Germany. British military missions to Russia, however, had become staunchly anti-Bolshevik in the meantime, and took it upon themselves to embroil Britain in the Russian Civil War as a way of furthering their own, personal anti-communist crusades. Millman, in his article "The Problem with Generals", correctly identified that it was the generals who dragged Britain into the Russian Civil War, acting as quasi-colonial "men-on-the-spot" who often ignored or reversed official British policy. However, Millman only discussed how British generals initiated the Allied intervention. Looking at the role of General

¹⁵⁹ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 9.

¹⁶⁰ Watson, "Britain, France, & the Russian Civil War," 93.

Poole and General Ironside in Archangel, or that of General Knox and Britmis in Siberia, it is clear that the opinions of the capricious "generals-on-the-spot" determined the course of the British intervention from the decision to intervene all the way to the decision to abandon the White cause. Poole ramped up the British war against the Bolsheviks until Ironside replaced him and reversed course entirely; the British government meekly acquiesced to both, and to Knox, who convinced London against its better judgment to back Admiral Kolchak and spend millions of pounds funding the White Army in Siberia. The case of the French intervention in South Russia shows why, due to limited resources and stronger government control of foreign policy, the French never had their own "generals-on-the-spot" in Russia. Thus the Allied "general-on-the-spot" remained a uniquely British phenomenon during the Russian Civil War. It was not limited to Archangel and Siberia, however: British generals also played outsized roles in making foreign policy in the Caucasus, in South Russia, and in Persia and Central Asia, where the war concerned not only the Allies, the Whites, and the Reds, but also the Ottomans, the Germans, and many different national groups. Analyzing how "generals-on-the-spot" influenced British foreign policy in these regions after the start of the Allied intervention offers a promising route for further research.

Millman noted that though the generals acted heedlessly, they do not deserve the blame for Britain's irresponsible policies in the Russian Civil War.¹⁶¹ In the end, a complete lack of guidance from the government at home characterized Britain's intervention in the Russian Civil War and allowed the generals to chart the course as they wished, which, due to their prior anti-Bolshevik biases, naturally led them into a wasteful and fruitless war against the Bolsheviks that succeeded only in making the Soviet Union the pariah state of the early twentieth century and irreparably damaging its relations with the West. In 1918, Lloyd George, who opposed the war

¹⁶¹ Millman, "The Problem with Generals," 320.

in Russia but did not put his foot down to stop it, dismissively and hypocritically called a British mission to the Caucasus "a highly disreputable enterprise". He may as well have been speaking for the entirety of the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War.

Appendix

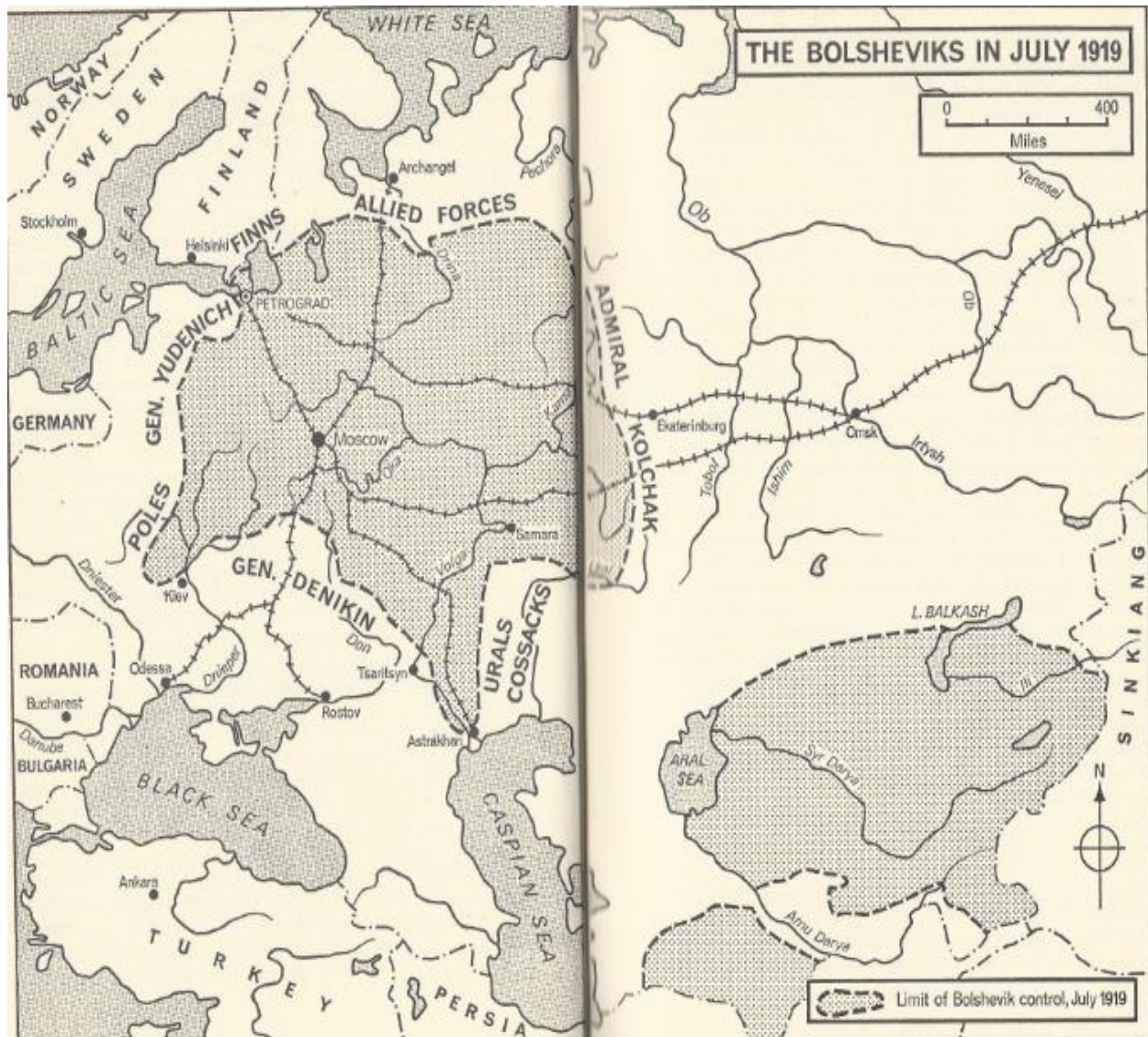


Figure 1: Russia at the very height of the Civil War. Within a few months, the White Army would be decisively defeated and pushed back, and the Allied would evacuate North Russia. By the end of the year, the Bolsheviks had beaten every major internal threat.



Figure 2: A White Army propaganda poster shows a British soldier, with planes, guns, and trucks in tow, coming to help White soldiers fight the Bolsheviks, depicted as a monster.



Figure 3: General Ironside presents awards to members of the Allied expeditionary force in North Russia.



Figure 4: British and White soldiers fight side-by-side in Northern Russia during the winter of 1918-1919.



Figure 5: Britmis poses with Kolchak and his wife Anna Timiryova, seated. Knox is standing directly behind Kolchak, with a pipe in his mouth.



Figure 6: White soldiers in Siberia, 1919. They have Russian rifles but are wearing British uniforms and gear.

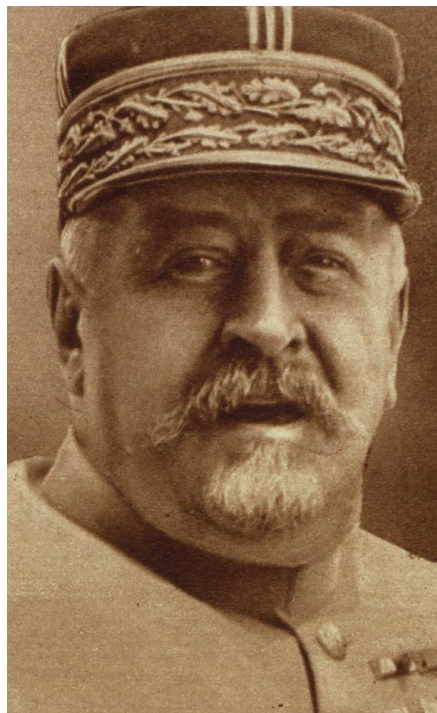


Figure 7: General Henri Berthelot



Figure 8: Colonial French troops and Volunteer Army soldiers in Odessa, 1919.

Bibliography

Maps & Photos

- Fig. 1: Map of Russia, 1919. In John Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968. 60-61. Map by Arthur Banks of Surrey Art Designs
- Fig. 2: White Army propaganda poster, 1919; <http://propagandahistory.ru/134/Grazhdanskaya-voyna-v-Rossii--Plakaty-belykh--CHast-I/>
- Fig. 3: General Ironside presents awards, 1918-1919, Imperial War Museum, Catalogue No. Q 16090
- Fig. 4: British and Russian soldiers, Archangel, University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, Catalogue No. BL000183
- Fig. 5: Kolchak and Britmis, 1919, Imperial War Museum, Catalogue No. Q 81123
- Fig. 6: Russian Army soldiers, Siberia, 1919, Courtesy of the Bullock Collection, <http://www.minecreek.info/bullock-collection/kolchaks-offensive.html>
- Fig. 7: General Berthelot, Photos of the Great War, World War I Image Archive, www.gwpda.org/photos
- Fig. 8: French colonial soldiers, Odessa, 1919, <http://www.valexandrov.com/vladimirs-black-russian-blog/2014/3/9/frederick-and-the-french-african-invasion-of-odessa-in-1918.html>

Documents

- British Documents on Foreign Affairs - Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office, Part I, Series F* (edited by John Keiger, D. Stevenson, Donald Cameron Watt, and Kenneth Bourne). Frederick, University Publications of America, 1987.
- Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Series I, Vol. III* (edited by E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler). London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1949.
- Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Russia, 1918*. Washington D.C.: G.P.O., 1931-37.
- Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Russia, 1919*. Washington D.C.: G.P.O., 1931-37.

The Testimony of Kolchak and Other Siberian Materials (edited by Elena Varneck and H.H. Fisher). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1935

War Cabinet Papers, January 8, 1919 - March 31, 1919 with Subject Index. British War Cabinet, CAB 23/9, 1919.

War Cabinet Papers, April 29, 1918. British War Cabinet, CAB 23/10, 1919.

Books and Articles

Beloff, Max. *Imperial Sunset Volume 1: Britain's Liberal Empire 1897-1921*. New York: Knopf, 1988.

Bennett, G.H. *British Foreign Policy During the Curzon Period, 1919-24*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Bradley, John. *Allied Intervention in Russia*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968.

Buzinkai, D. I. "The Bolsheviks, the League of Nations and the Paris Peace Conference, 1919." *Soviet Studies* 9 (1967): 256-263.

Carley, Michael Jabara. *Revolution and Intervention: The French Government and the Russian Civil War, 1917-1919*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983.

Denny, Alice, John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson. "A Synthesis of Views and a Challenge for the Future." In *British Imperialism: Gold, God, Glory*, edited by Robin W. Winks, 97-122. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963.

Fleming, Peter. *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963.

Galbraith, John. "The 'Turbulent Frontier' as a Factor in British Expansion." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (1960): 150-168.

Gilbert, Martin. *The First World War: A Complete History*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994.

Hayne, M.B. *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War, 1898-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Hughes, Michael. *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World, 1919-1939*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Janin, Maurice. *Ma mission en Sibérie : Avec deux croquis : 1918-1920*. Paris: Payot, 1933.

- Kenez, Peter. *Civil War in South Russia: The First Year of the Volunteer Army*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Kenez, Peter. *Civil War in South Russia: The Defeat of the Whites*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
- Kwarteng, Kwasi. *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World*. New York: Public Affairs, 2011.
- Kennan, George. *The Decision to Intervene*. Vol. 2 of *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Lincoln, W. Bruce. *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War*. London: Simon and Schuster, 1989.
- Lloyd George, David. *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*. Boston: Boston, Little, Brown, & Co., 1933-37.
- Millman, Brock. "The Problem with Generals: Military Observers and the Origins of Intervention in the Russia and Persia, 1917-18." *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (1998): 291-320.
- Munholland, J. Kim. "The French Army and Intervention in Southern Russia, 1918-1919." *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 22 (1981): 44-66.
- Pereira, N.G.O. *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996.
- Petroff, Serge. *Remembering a Forgotten War: Civil War in Eastern European Russia and Siberia, 1918-1920*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Pipes, Richard. *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1993.
- Rhodes, Benjamin. "The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel, 1918-1918: The Role of the 339th Infantry." *The International History Review* 8 (1986): 367-388.
- Siegel, Jennifer. "British Intelligence on the Russian Revolution and Civil War: A Breach at the Source." *Intelligence and National Security* 10 (1995): 468-485.
- Siegel, Jennifer. *For Peace and Money: French and British Finance in the Service of Tsars and Commissars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Silverlight, John. *The Victors' Dilemma: Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War*. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970.

- Smele, Jonathan. *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Smele, Jonathon (ed.). *The Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917-1921: An Annotated Bibliography*. London: Continuum, 2003.
- Smele, Jonathan. "White Gold: The Imperial Russian Gold Reserve in the Anti-Bolshevik East, 1918-? An Unconcluded Chapter in the History of the Russian Civil War." *Europe-Asia Studies* 46 (1994): 1317-1347.
- Ullman, Richard. *Intervention and the War*, vol. 1 of *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917 - 1921*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Ullman, Richard. *Britain and the Russian Civil War*, vol. 2 of *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917 - 1921*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Ward, John. *With the 'Die-Hards' in Siberia*. New York: Doran, 1920.
- Watson, David. "Britain, France, and the Russian Civil War." In *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, edited by Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone, 89-103. London: Routledge, 2000.
- White, Stephen. *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution*. London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1979.
- Xydias, Jean. *L'Intervention française en Russie, 1918-1919*. Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1927.